



WRESTLEMANIA 1

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WRESTLEMANIA

31

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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Airplane spin | 21. Face rake | 41. Leg lock |
| 2. Arm drag | 22. Fireman's carry ram | 42. Leg sweep |
| 3. Arm lock | 23. Flying body press | 43. Manager interference |
| 4. Asian spike | 24. Flying clothesline | 44. Monkey flip |
| 5. Atomic drop | 25. Flying drop kick | 45. Overhead toss |
| 6. Bear hug | 26. Flying elbow drop | 46. Pole ram |
| 7. Bite | 27. Flying head butt | 47. Reverse chin lock |
| 8. Body slam | 28. Flying mare | 48. Rolling scissors |
| 9. Body tackle | 29. Forearm smash | 49. Rope burn |
| 10. Bulldog | 30. Foreign object | 50. Russian sickle |
| 11. Chicken wing | 31. Full nelson | 51. Savate kick |
| 12. Choke slam | 32. Giant swing | 52. Scissors grip |
| 13. Claw | 33. Grapevine | 53. Shoulder breaker |
| 14. Clothesline | 34. Hair pull | 54. Slingshot |
| 15. Cross body block | 35. Hammer lock | 55. Snap mare |
| 16. Double axehandle | 36. Head lock | 56. Step-over toe hold |
| 17. Drop kick | 37. Head stomp | 57. Suplex |
| 18. Eagle split | 38. Hip roll | 58. Surfboard |
| 19. Elbow smash | 39. Irish whip | 59. Tumbuckle smash |
| 20. Eye gouge | 40. Knee drop | 60. Wrist lock |

SET-UP HOLDS

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 61. Abdominal stretch | 71. Cradle | 81. Power bomb |
| 62. Avalanche | 72. Crucifix | 82. Power slam |
| 63. Backbreaker | 73. DDT | 83. Scorpion deathlock |
| 64. Backroll press | 74. Figure four | 84. Sleeper |
| 65. Belly to belly | 75. Flying leg drop | 85. Slingshot suplex |
| 66. Big splash | 76. Gourd buster | 86. Spine buster |
| 67. Boston crab | 77. Hurricane | 87. Stunner |
| 68. Brain buster | 78. Moonsault | 88. Sunset flip |
| 69. Camel clutch | 79. Neckbreaker | 89. Superplex |
| 70. Cobra clutch | 80. Piledriver | 90. Texas cloverleaf |

YOUR NAME (PRINT NEATLY)

STREET ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES)

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.

FROM the DESK OF...

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ILLUSTRATED

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Founder
(1919-2002)

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CM PUNK told the story on Colt Cabana's *Art Of Wrestling* podcast of a time two years back when he asked Vince McMahon for his permission to walk his buddy, Chael Sonnen, to the Octagon for his UFC fight. McMahon, Punk said, denied his request.

"Oh my God, Phil," McMahon told him. "We can't do that. That's barbaric. Somebody is going to die."

Punk countered by reminding him that someone—Owen Hart—already died at a WWE event. It was a weak argument. Hart died as the result of a stunt gone horribly wrong. The object of UFC is to try to kill someone until the opponent or the referee says "enough."

Unlike a growing number of wrestling fans, I don't care for mixed martial arts. I consider it something akin to what pro wrestling would be in a bizarro world where the combatants couldn't care less about the welfare of their opponents. My sporting tastes are not exactly pure. I like a good hockey fight and home plate collisions (before they were outlawed). I still get angry when I see a kickoff float out of the end zone because the girly-men powers-that-be in the NFL deemed returns too dangerous. Many of you know that I was the publisher of *Ring* magazine for 20 years. Yes, I like boxing.

MMA, however? That's beyond even my sadistic tastes.

McMahon may not be as disgusted by MMA as he claims to be. More likely, he's disgusted by the fact that MMA—and UFC in particular— infringes on his market share.

Is the UFC a competitor to WWE? Don't believe Vince when he says, "Mixed martial arts is not a competitor of ours at all. They're a sport, we're an entertainment, two completely different points of view and philosophies."

Perhaps that's so, but more and more it's becoming evident that there is a sizeable overlap of customers—customers who do not have unlimited discretionary income and who might end up deciding which company to spend it on. The fact that wrestling and MMA have common fans is undeniable. In our most recent "PWI Poll" (July 2014 edition), subscribers listed MMA as (excluding wrestling) their second favorite sport behind football. Prominent pro wrestling websites and newsletters also include MMA news.

But McMahon has more to concern himself with than the rise in popularity of MMA among wrestling's fan base. And that's the rise in popularity of MMA among its own rank and file. Punk is one of many pro wrestlers who are totally enamored with it. Of course, it's too late for men like the The Undertaker, Big Show, and maybe even Punk himself to make career changes, but how would history have been rewritten if UFC were as popular 15 years ago as it is now? Well, we probably would have missed out on seeing Kurt Angle as a pro wrestler. How many others who could have become great pro wrestlers now choose MMA instead?

This issue of *PWI* has a thread of MMA running throughout. Alberto (Del Rio) el Patron speaks about the possibility of a return to MMA (page 20), former NWA and UFC champion Dan Severn writes a piece on how well he thinks Punk will do in UFC (page 28), Bobby Lashley juggles time with TNA and MMA company Bellator (page 36), and former MMA stars Kazushi Sakuraba and Minoru Suzuki competed in an MMA-style bout at Wrestle Kingdom 9 (page 40).

Like peanut butter, MMA is a little hard for me to swallow. But if pro wrestling is going to be the jelly on the sandwich, I may be able to deal with it.

Pass the milk, please.

Stu Saks
Publisher

Pro Wrestling Illustrated (ISSN: 1043-7576), Vol. 36, No. 3, 2015, is published bi-monthly by Kappa Publishing Group Inc., 6198 Butler Pike, Suite 200, Blue Bell, PA 19422. Periodicals postage paid at Blue Bell, PA 19422, and additional post offices. Postmaster: Send change of address notices to: Pro Wrestling Illustrated, P.O. Box 433120, Palm Coast, FL 32143. Single copy price \$6.99 U.S./Canada (\$4.99 in U.K.). Annual subscription price \$41.94 in the U.S., \$58.44 in Canada and Mexico, and \$86.94 in other countries. Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage. The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2015 Kappa Publishing Group, Inc. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy or content of any advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. All WWE trademarks, logos and copyrights are the exclusive property of WWE and its subsidiaries. All other trademarks, logos and copyrights are the property of their respective owners. ©2015 WWE, Inc. All Rights Reserved. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES AND RATES: (215) 461-6583. U.S. and Canadian distribution by Kable Distribution Services Inc., 14 Wall Street, Suite 4C, New York, NY 10022. International distribution by Worldwide Media Service Inc., 115 East 23rd St., New York, NY 10005. U.K. distribution by Comag, Tavistock Rd., West Drayton, Middlesex UB770E, England.
Printed in U.S.A.



*Taryn
Terrell*

**TNA KNOCKOUTS CHAMP
EARNS A SOLID B+**

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING



JUNE 2015

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Pro Wrestling Illustrated—August 2015. Digital edition on sale April 30, 2015; print edition on sale May 26, 2015

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REACHING EACH OTHER ...

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28 THE ULTIMATE QUESTION: HOW WILL CM PUNK FARE IN MMA?

As one of two people in the entire world who has been both a pro wrestling and UFC champion, Dan Severn is eminently qualified to discuss CM Punk's chances for success in his new vocation

32 A DREAM CARD 30 YEARS IN THE MAKING: WRESTLEMANIA 1 VS. WRESTLEMANIA 31

It's always fun to fantasize about how well today's stars would match up with those from another generation. With WrestleMania fever at its peak, we got into the spirit by creating several fictitious pairings of stars from the inaugural and most recent 'Manias

36 BEAT DOWN BY HIS OWN FEARS: WHAT LASHLEY MUST DO TO RISE AGAIN

Even men of superhuman strength find comfort in being led by Type A personalities. There was something lacking in Lashley that made him feel comfortable with MVP at his side. That may not be the case anymore

40 WRESTLE KINGDOM 9: OPENING WESTERN EYES TO THE WONDERS OF NEW JAPAN

We're getting to the point where U.S. fans no longer have to sound out the names of Japanese wrestlers when reading "International Report" in *PWI*. With Wrestle Kingdom 9 on PPV and a national TV contract on AXS, New Japan stars Shinsuke Nakamura, Hiroshi Tanahashi, and Kazuchika Okada are quickly becoming household names in the States

45 REPORT CARDS OF THE STARS

As is our annual custom, *PWI* chooses the top stars in the sport and gives them report card grades for their previous year's body of work. You already know who got one of the two A+ grades. Can you guess the other?



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COVER DESIGN:

Edd Wright

BEFORE the BELL

COMPILED BY KEVIN McELVANEY

THE SHEIK

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to describe Khosrow Vaziri's life as cinematic, even epic. It is appropriate, then, that this documentary about the man we know as The Iron Sheik is effectively split into three acts. The story begins with Sheik's early life in Iran. Then, it covers his move to America, his meteoric rise as a wrestling villain, and his eventual fall from grace. Finally, it reflects on his surprising pop culture resurgence over the past 10 years and, ultimately, his legacy. Director Igal Hecht leaves no stone unturned, delving into the professional and personal lives of a charismatic, captivating human being.

We see Sheik reflect on his career, from his amateur days to his time as WWE champion. Hulk Hogan credits Sheik's passing the torch as the jumping point for his own stardom. Nikolai Volkoff sings the praises of his longtime partner. Sheik's career ups and downs are discussed in great detail, with running commentary from Jim Ross, Jake Roberts, and many others who've worked with or befriended him. We learn about the man behind the villainous persona. (Spoiler alert: He began his career as a fan favorite in the AWA.) Viewers also get to meet his family, including wife Caryl, their daughters, and family friends-cum-managers Jian and Page Magen, who helped the legendary grappler through some difficult personal times and later worked to make him an unlikely Internet celebrity.

Stylistically, the documentary feels almost like three separate films. Sheik's early years are covered with the sort of academic tone one would expect from an ESPN documentary. We learn about Sheik's amateur background and how it led to a role as a bodyguard for Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, then-Shah of Iran. His active wrestling years are

documented with clips from early and independent matches, as well as a wealth of excellent photos (including some from our own *PWI* archives). What this section of the film lacks in licensed WWE footage, it makes up for in stylish flourishes—original animations and Ken Burns-style visual effects make

for particularly striking footage. The final third of the documentary is full of excerpts from Sheik's many radio appearances, movies and TV cameos, and infamous YouTube clips. Celebrities and wrestling legends alike pay reverence to the Sheik and his undeniable impact on the pop culture landscape. Bret Hart cites him as a major influence. There is also a particularly touching anecdote relayed by The Rock.

None of this is to suggest that the film is a mere celebration of The Iron Sheik's achievements. He has had his demons, and a sizable portion of the film's 95 minutes is devoted to documenting his personal struggles with addiction and familial heartbreak. The pain is palpable in these scenes. Still, these challenges are part of Sheik's story and cannot be ignored.

The Sheik is an uncompromising, honest biography of a wrestling legend: a man who, as Jim Ross says, had the ability to "beat 99 percent of the guys in the business," if he'd only wanted. Available for rent or purchase at the iTunes Store, we give this thorough examination of Sheik's life five suplexes out of five.



TALKIN' TRASH

10. **NXT Takeover R-Evolution** airs to great acclaim.

If you're not already watching *NXT* on the WWE Network, you might want to get to it at this point. It's often as good as (or better than) *Raw*.

9. **The Authority is dethroned, then reluctantly returned to power by John Cena.**

It could be worse. It could be Mike Adamle again ... or the anonymous *Raw* GM.

8. **Triple-H consoles a crying young fan at Raw, upset by Hunter's villainous persona.**

Where was our consolation after we watched *The Chaperone*?

7. **CM Punk announces plans to compete for UFC.**

No word on whether he'll be reporting to Minnesota Vikings training camp first.

6. **Impact Wrestling relaunches its brand on Destination America.**

No longer the little fish in the big pond, TNA has a partner that will allow the company the time and freedom to try new and interesting concepts.

5. **WWE Network is finally available in the U.K.**

Now British fans can stop wasting time complaining online about the Network's delays and instead waste it watching *Road Wild '98*.

4. **Alberto El Patron signs with Ring of Honor and Lucha Underground.**

The former Del Rio's "future endeavors" are reminding us of AJ Styles' after he left TNA, and that's definitely a good thing.

3. **The post-Royal Rumble edition of Raw is moved to the company's Stamford, Connecticut, headquarters due to a New England storm.**

Vince McMahon, a man who reportedly considers a sneeze a defeat to his bodily control, couldn't have been happy about this.

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related items you've been talking about lately and our gut reaction to each:

2. **New Japan and Global Force Wrestling co-present Wrestling Kingdom 9.**

Some of the best wrestlers from Japan and around the globe, on pay-per-view TV in the United States? Shut up and take our money!

1. **Roman Reigns wins the 2015 Royal Rumble match and a World title shot at WrestleMania 31.**

Disappointed they can't think up a chant as clever as "Boo-tis-ta," Philly fans vow to come up with something catchy by SummerSlam.



ALBERTO vs. CHRISTOPHER DANIELS in ROH

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHRING OF HONOR

WE HEARD THAT!

"It isn't the fact that people hate Reigns. They hate him being forced on them. There are other stars than Bryan, too: Ziggler, Rollins, Ambrose, Wyatt, Cesaro. Even Mizdown/Sandow is more popular than Reigns."

—Bill McCollum, *Indiana wrestling fan, commenting on Roman Reigns' Royal Rumble victory on whatculture.com*

"Whether it's love or hate, if I can be out there, that's all that matters for me. If I can go out there, and they're gonna make some noise, they're gonna do what they want, that's cool. They paid their money, they can do whatever they want. They can cheer. They can boo. As long as I can be a part of it and do my thing, I'm smitten, man."

—Roman Reigns, *discussing the negative response from fans at the Rumble*

"This is a different group of guys and gals. It's millennials. They're not as ambitious, quite frankly, and they're not trepidatious at all. I just don't think they necessarily want to reach for that brass ring."

—Vince McMahon to Steve Austin on a live edition of *The Steve Austin Show* on WWE Network

"I can't even comprehend that statement. It doesn't sit with our group. My own roster's completely different than that. The young guys are just as hungry. The young guys from 10 years ago are now the Bobby Roode, Samoa Joes, James Storms. I'm proud of how far they've come. This young group of talent we have right now, they're the hardest working, most positive team players around."

—Dixie Carter's response to McMahon's comments in an interview with U.K. publication *The Mirror*

ONE TO WATCH: *MARK ANDREWS*

Welsh high-flyer Mark Andrews ("Mandrews," as he's sometimes called) is set to make a big splash in TNA in 2015. Although well established on the U.K.'s independent scene, his career trajectory changed when he was announced as the winner of *British Boot Camp 2*, a reality series in which more than two dozen eager British grapplers competed for a TNA contract.

The 23-year-old Cardiff native, already an eight-year ring veteran, has been a fan of high-risk wrestling since a very young age. The first match he remembers watching is one of WWE's early TLC bouts. Later, TNA's X division inspired him to want to become a wrestler. Now that he's with TNA, it's not hard to guess where Andrews looks to make his mark.

"I think I can bring a bit of excitement to the X division," he said. "I've got an innovative style that fans have never seen before."

At 5'8" and 150 pounds, Andrews isn't going to outsize many opponents. "Even the smaller guys in wrestling don't seem to be as small as me," he admitted. Still, he doesn't view this as a drawback. "I'm hoping that gives me a bit more of a unique selling point. I can move around a bit differently and show some more creativity in the ring."

During the taping of *British Boot Camp 2*, Andrews made a huge impression on TNA brass, including Dixie Carter. He looks forward to doing the same with American audiences. "In the U.K., wrestling is a little bit more of a niche product," he said, noting that mainstream British fans are generally quieter than their American counterparts. "It's nice to know that the fans know what they want to see."

Andrews maintains an active life outside of wrestling. He's a member of Welsh pop punk band, Junior. "Music and wrestling were always the two things in my life," he said. "I started wrestling when I was 13, and I started playing guitar when I was 12." He hopes his time in TNA will bring exposure to Junior.

For such a young wrestler, Andrews is already in a great position. He seems eager to tap into his own potential. "I'm young. I've got a few years ahead of me to really make the most out of my wrestling career," he said. "I'm just excited for everything that's coming up."

Andrews has already begun competing for TNA stateside. He's teamed with fellow U.K. native (and first season *British Boot Camp* winner) Rockstar Spud on multiple occasions. His long-term goal, though, is to win the X division championship.

"That," he said, "would be a dream come true."



PHOTO BY TONY KNOX/TNA WRESTLING

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: *THE PWI PODCAST*

Have you heard the latest supplement to *PWI*? If not, you should. *The PWI Podcast* is our latest expansion into the digital realm. Each episode is co-hosted by Senior Writers Dan Murphy and Al Castle and features discussion of things deeply relevant to readers of this magazine. The episodes feature guests from *PWI*'s past and present, as well as discussion of wrestling topics old and new.

Murphy and Castle are both esteemed wrestling journalists with years of experience between them. Together, they create an engaging and informative show for old and new readers alike. "For my money, Dan is the preeminent wrestling magazine writer of his generation," Castle says. "I've also been covering wrestling for almost two decades and got my start in radio."

The idea for the show dates back a couple of years, even though it began production in December. "Dan Murphy and I regularly appear on various other wrestling radio shows and podcasts to talk about wrestling and promote different features in the magazine, especially the 'PWI 500,'" said Castle. "A couple of times we've appeared together and had some pretty spirited debates. Publisher Stu Saks liked what he



AL CASTLE



DAN MURPHY

heard and figured, rather than just have us appear on other people's shows, we should have our own."

The show provides an audio look behind the scenes of *PWI*, with Saks and former editor Craig Peters appearing in early episodes. In addition to providing walks down memory lane, *The PWI Podcast* is also tuned sharply into the present. The hosts provide audio content from *PWI* "Press Conferences," previews of content from upcoming issues, and analysis of current wrestling events and news stories. "It was a blast talking to Alberto Del Rio, who dropped some huge bombshells about his lawsuit with WWE and about a major name he expects to join him at Lucha Underground," Castle said. "Usually, by the time fans would read that interview in the magazine two months later, it would be old news. But, with the podcast, we were able to put up clips of it within a couple days. We hope to be able to do a lot more of that in the future."

The PWI Podcast is available for free at www.pwi-online.com, YouTube, and by subscription at the iTunes Store. □

RINGSIDE

WITH HARRY BURKETT

ROMAN REIGNS HASN'T been able to catch a break over the past several months, from the incarcerated hernia he suffered prior to Night of Champions, to his controversial victory at The Royal Rumble—a result even less popular than **Brock Lesnar's** win over **The Undertaker** at WrestleMania 30.

After Reigns eliminated **Kane**, **The Big Show**, and **Rusev** to win The Royal Rumble, the tough Philadelphia fans responded with deafening boos. Even **The Rock**, who conveniently rushed to the

ring to save Reigns from an attack by Kane and Big Show, couldn't save the moment.

Rock was embarrassed. Reigns must have been mortified.

The fallout was so fierce that **Triple-H** and **Stephanie McMahon**, acknowledging the “cancelwwenetwork” hashtag that had emerged after the Rumble, came out on the February 2 edition of *Raw* and persuaded Reigns to give up his guaranteed WWE World title shot at WrestleMania 31. Before he could get the title shot, he'd have to defeat the winner of

a **Daniel Bryan-Seth Rollins** bout later in the evening at the next pay-per-view, Fast Lane.

Why has the WWE Universe turned on Reigns so harshly?

The problem is the planned coronation of Reigns at WrestleMania 31 came in the midst of Bryan's return, in addition to consistently strong performances of other superstars, such as **Dean Ambrose**, **Dolph Ziggler**, and even Seth Rollins. Even dark horses such as **Bad News Barrett** or **Cesaro** might have had more appeal at this point. And, in this era of social media, fans don't tolerate being force-fed.

What are Reigns' options? Embrace the heat with a heel turn? Adopt a page out of the **John Cena** playbook and struggle through a year of obstacles to prove he's not the golden boy? Have **Sting** rescue him next time?

Despite the Rumble misfire, **Vince McMahon** isn't likely to change his long-term plan to make Reigns his next megastar. Expect Triple-H and Stephanie to recite his rich Samoan heritage a few more times. Regardless of what happens at Fast Lane or WrestleMania 31, it will be interesting to see how Creative navigates the rugged shoals of fan discontent.

Triple-H discussed a wide range of topics with **Steve Austin** during his *Steve Austin Show* podcast, which aired live on the WWE Network. Triple-H empathized with fan reaction to Reigns' Rumble victory and certainly didn't seem to have a blame-the-fans mentality. He acknowledged that hitting the right note to please all fans is more difficult than ever.

“It's tough to find that person who appeals to every single person, eight to 80,” he said. “There's an eight-year-old who wants something different than the 22-year-old with his buddies, who wants something different than Mom and Pop and the grandparents. [Laughing] The worst thing is

Even the endorsement of **The Rock** couldn't quell the animus of Philadelphia fans, who were outraged that Roman Reigns—not Daniel Bryan—won The Royal Rumble. WWE reshuffled the deck, but where does that leave Reigns?



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

making someone a babyface now.”

The WWE executive vice president also drew a distinction between viewers who simply watch the shows versus fans who follow the entire industry, including behind-the-scenes news. Viewers who just watch the shows are more likely to cheer Reigns and John Cena. Those who follow insider news are likely to be much more sensitive to who is being pushed versus who is not receiving a push.

Triple-H is right. The game has changed.

Vito LoGrasso, who enjoyed runs in WWE, WCW, and ECW during the 1990s and early-2000s, has joined former WWE developmental wrestler **Evan Singleton (Adam Mercer)** in a federal class-action lawsuit against WWE in a Philadelphia court. Both men claim WWE is responsible for concussions they incurred in the ring. LoGrasso says he is suffering from neurological damage, including deafness. Mercer cites more extensive brain damage.

“It’s totally violence,” **Harris**

Pogust, an attorney for both men, told Philly’s KYW-TV. “In the NFL, if you have a concussion, they make you sit it out. And if you have too many, you can’t ever get back in the game ... Somebody’s got to say stop instead of keep enticing them to get back in.”

WWE attorney **Jerry McDevitt** responded to the suit: “WWE has never concealed any medical information related to concussions, or otherwise, from our [performers]. WWE was well ahead of sports organizations in implementing concussion management procedures and policies as a precautionary measure as the science and research on this issue emerged.”

Bobby Lashley suffered a hand injury during training and was forced to cancel a scheduled MMA fight against **James Thompson** at Bellator 134, to be aired on Spike. Lashley is frustrated by the cancellation because he had hoped to avenge a previous loss to the rugged Brit. Lashley, whose MMA record is 12-2, told *Mancunian Matters* during a TNA tour of the United Kingdom,

“Yes, I will definitely get a chance to avenge that loss. It’s not really about revenge; it’s just about beating him. I have a contract in front of me right now for Bellator and I’m looking forward to that. We’ll sign this contract, and, this year, I hope I’ll be fighting for the world title.”

Let’s hope the **Beat Down Clan** doesn’t plan a run-in for that one. Lashley also had some very interesting comments regarding one of his former peers in WWE, **CM Punk**, and his odds of success in MMA. “The reason it’s going to be a good thing is because when you’re



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

Vito LoGrasso, appearing on Smackdown in 2006, is part of a lawsuit claiming WWE did not do enough to protect him and other performers from the effects of concussions.

a successful person, you learn the model of being successful,” he said. “Once you’ve learned that model of being successful, you can use that and transition into anything you want, and everything he does now is going to be successful.”

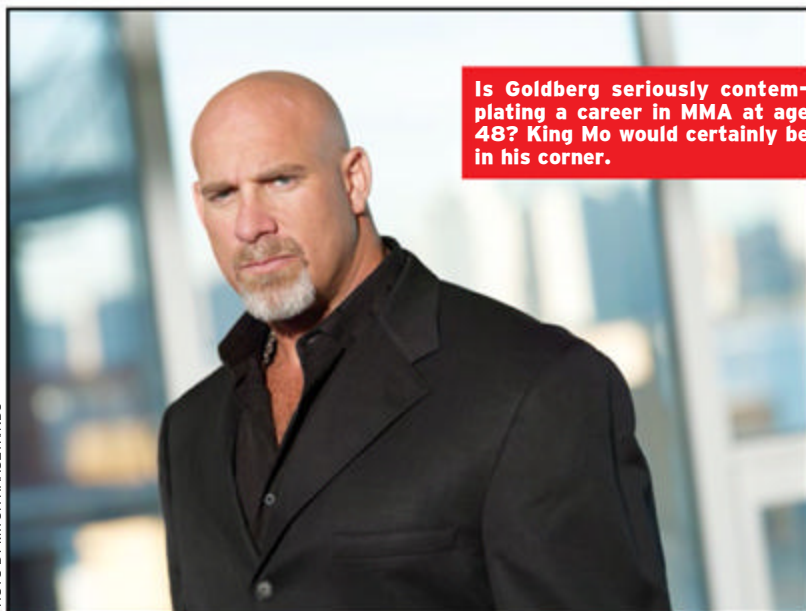
If you think it’s amazing that 38-year-old Lashley and 36-year-old Punk are pursuing MMA careers with such youthful vigor, consider 48-year-old **Bill Goldberg**, who is the latest to be touted as a future MMA star. Well, at least that’s what **Muhammed “King Mo” Lawal** said after working with the former WWE and WCW World champion at the American Top Team facility in Florida.

“He’s a fast learner,” King Mo said on *Submission Radio*. “He has some crazy power, great athlete, very knowledgeable. Like, it shocked me ... I don’t know, just mechanically he’s good. I hope he gets a chance to fight. And I wouldn’t mind bringing him in to my next camp if I fight a heavy-weight. I’d bring him in to help me



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHTNA WRESTLING

We can look forward to many battles between Awesome Kong and Jessicka Havok, now that AK has signed a contract with TNA.



Is Goldberg seriously contemplating a career in MMA at age 48? King Mo would certainly be in his corner.

train for my next fight.”

Added King Mo, “Put him out there and let him fight on Spike TV. You know, why not? Let him fight on Spike TV. Let him headline a card, because he has a big following, he’s a superstar, a big fan base.”

Maybe someone should inform Mo that Goldberg is rather injury-prone, as proven during his wrestling career. Here’s a thought: Goldberg vs. Lashley for the TNA World title, MMA rules. Start writing the check, Dixie.

By the way, TNA President **Dixie Carter** plans to write more checks for **Jeff Hardy**, **Kenny King**, **Manik**, **Mark Andrews**, and **Awesome Kong**, all of whom negotiated new contracts with Director of Talent Relations **John “Big” Gaburick**. **Drew Galloway** (formerly known as **Drew McIntyre**) became an instant enemy of the Beat Down Clan upon his TNA debut. He defeated King in his first match in Manchester, and beat **MVP** by disqualification in his second match in London.

Alberto El Patron (formerly known as **Alberto**

Del Rio) scored a huge win in his Ring of Honor debut, defeating ROH founding father **Christopher Daniels**. El Patron has already expressed interest in challenging ROH champion **Jay Briscoe**. But we’ll have to see how many victories El Patron can string together in ROH, considering his upcoming AAA heavyweight title defenses and his commitments with Lucha Underground.

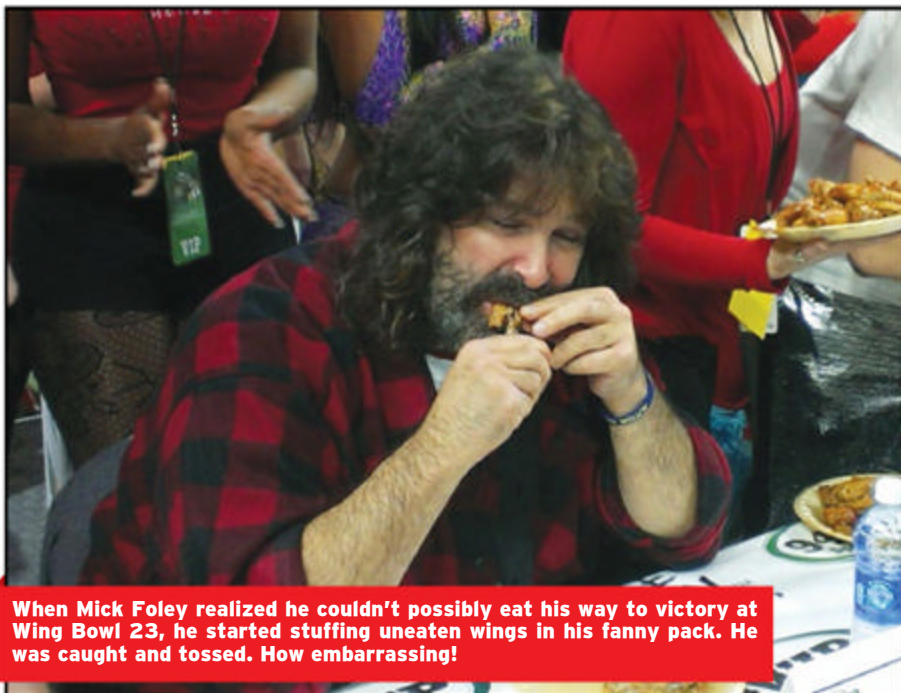
Mick Foley created plenty of controversy at WIP Radio’s Wing Bowl in Philadelphia, where he was

disqualified from the food-eating contest for stashing wings in his fanny pack. When interviewed about his DQ, Foley cut an old-fashioned heel promo, ending with a cheap pop, “right here in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania!”

No word on whether Foley will challenge fellow wing enthusiast **Ryback**.

Congratulations to **The Rock ‘n’ Roll Express**, who were 2014 inductees into the *Wrestling Observer Hall of Fame*. The former NWA World tag team champions spearheaded the unprecedented popularity of tag team wrestling in the 1980s, thanks to their intense feuds with **The Koloffs** and **The Midnight Express**. They also achieved tremendous success in the Mid-South, World Class Championship Wrestling, and Memphis.

Former Philadelphia promoter **Ray Fabiani** was inducted posthumously into the Hall of Fame. He and New York promoter **Toots Mondt** formed a strategic alliance, controlling world champions **Dick Shikat** and **Rudy Dusek**, among other Northeast headliners, during the 1930s. Fabiani, who dominated the Philly scene until the 1960s, was instrumental in bringing to-



When Mick Foley realized he couldn’t possibly eat his way to victory at Wing Bowl 23, he started stuffing uneaten wings in his fanny pack. He was caught and tossed. How embarrassing!

gether the partnership of Mondt and **Vincent J. McMahon**, which eventually brought about the World Wide Wrestling Federation and modern-day WWE. He passed away in 1973.

Forty years have passed since pilot **Buddy Colt** and fellow wrestlers **Mike McCord** (**Austin Idol**), **Gary Hart**, and **Bobby Shane** boarded a small plane that crashed into Tampa Bay, and that tragedy—which occurred on February 20, 1975—is remembered by old-timers to this very day. Shane was killed upon impact and Colt suffered career-ending injuries. Only McCord and Hart would continue in the wrestling business.

“I saw that we were getting ready to slam into the water, and it immediately registered in my brain, *You’re dead—bang*,” Idol told me in a 2012 interview. “Then the plane crashed and everything went into slow motion ... It was like a dream. This sounds weird, but it seemed like a good opportunity to die. I don’t mean I wanted to die, but it seemed like an easy way to die.”

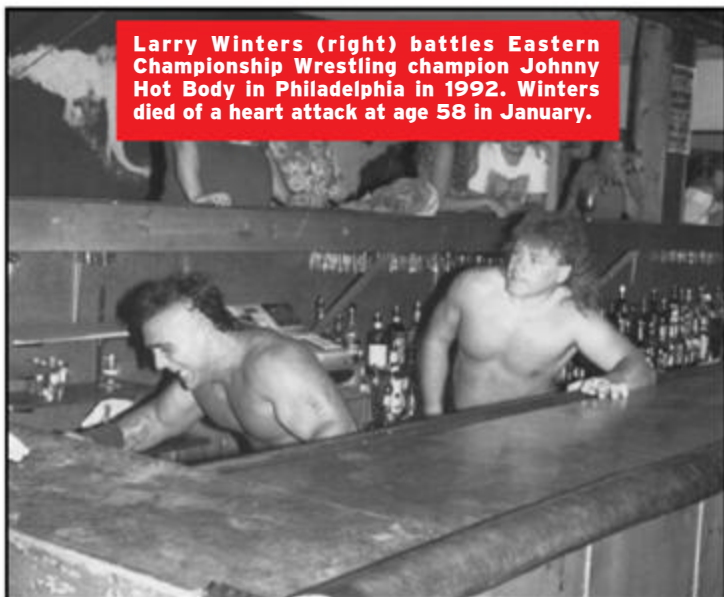
The *Tampa Tribune* recently contacted Colt regarding the 40th anniversary. “It’s not

something that I constantly think about,” he said. “I’ve never been nervous about crashing again. It was an accident. A tragic one, but still an accident.”

Before we part, I’d like to acknowledge the passing of **Larry Winters**, who died of a heart attack on January 27. He was 58. Winters was a staple of the Northeast wrestling scene in the 1980s and ’90s. His feud with **D.C. Drake** helped launch **Joel Goodhart’s** Tri-State Wrestling, which evolved into ECW. The sight of Winters throwing Drake over a balcony railing and onto the concrete floor below was the first glimmer of the upcoming hardcore revolution.

I’d also like to acknowledge the deaths of indy wrestler **Tim Arson** (age 38), southern female star **Dotty Downs** (age 78), Ohio-based star **Johnny Thunder** (age 80), Canadian star **The Great Malumba** (age 93), and 1930s and ’40s wrestler **Paul “Bomber” Singh** (age 100), and wrestler/manager/trainer **Phyllis Lee** (age 76).

That’s all for now. Save a ringside seat for me.



Larry Winters (right) battles Eastern Championship Wrestling champion Johnny Hot Body in Philadelphia in 1992. Winters died of a heart attack at age 58 in January.

NEWS ANALYSIS

REINING IN REIGNS

Roman Reigns will emerge from his current creative quagmire and be a stronger superstar because of it. Fans still appreciate straightforward power wrestlers. Consider Ryback. I thought his World title hopes were over when he was relegated to teaming with Curtis Axel. But he survived Rybaxel to become more popular than ever. Once the fans make you bleed a while, they’ll embrace you again.

NEW VOICE OF REASON

Jim Ross was considered WWE’s voice of reason, both behind the announce desk and as vice president of talent relations. Then he enhanced that reputation with wwe.com’s Ross Report and his jrsbbq.com blog. Now his friend, Steve Austin, has emerged as that voice of reason with his podcast. Like Ross, he has never lost touch with his pro wrestling roots and he’s not afraid of the powers-that-be.

"DA MAN" AND BIG MO

Goldberg has Big Mo Lawal in his corner if he ever decides to take on MMA, which he’s been teasing for a decade. In the past, I would’ve encouraged TNA to pursue Goldberg, simply because of his name recognition. But TNA is finding a niche these days as a gritty action-based alternative to WWE. I wouldn’t mind seeing the spectacle of Goldberg in MMA, but not TNA. Thanks anyway.

THE OTHER 1975 PLANE CRASH

In wrestling lore, the Tampa Bay accident has always paled in comparison to the North Carolina crash involving Ric Flair, Johnny Valentine, Mr. Wrestling, and Bob Bruggers—primarily because Flair recovered from his injuries to become arguably the best of all-time. But, for pure drama, when told by a captivating storyteller such as Austin Idol, that crash has all the makings of a TV movie.

QUICK COUNT

BY AL CASTLE

WITH MORE FIRST-RUN wrestling airing on TV than anytime in recent history, fans are getting more than their fill of ads. Even during *Raw*, you might find wrestlers and announcers shilling for movies, fast food chains, and toys. These days, it seems the only ones not selling anything on WWE television are The Ascension.

Here's an advertising slogan-themed edition of "Quick Count," after which we'll resume the action in progress.

GOOD TO THE LAST DROP

As they did in 2014, 2013, 2012, and just about every year for the past decade, many fans

will, no doubt, speculate that 2015 will be the year that John Cena turns bad. But I'm not holding my breath.

Turning 38 this April, and having competed since 1999, odds are that Cena has fewer years ahead of him in his career than behind him. So why, in his final years, would Mr. "Hustle, Loyalty, Respect" risk tarnishing his legacy just to briefly spark some interest in a new heel persona?

For all the world titles he's won, and T-shirts he's sold, Cena's greatest accomplishment since becoming a main-event star could be never turning his back on the fans—even the ones booing him.

JUST DO IT

If you've ever watched the old 1960s *Batman* series, you've no doubt wondered why Gotham City's villains would take such indirect measures to rid themselves of the Caped Crusader, when, inevitably, Batman would always find a way to escape.

I've felt much the same way in recent months watching WWE's villainous authority figures put so many loopholes in their own way while purporting to do "what's best for business." We saw it when Vince McMahon unnecessarily added the stipulation that John Cena could bring back The Authority after Stephanie and Triple-H were vanquished at Survivor Series. It was much the same when they returned to power in January, and fired Ryback, Dolph Ziggler, and Erick Rowan—only to provide them ample opportunities to get their jobs back.

For decades, wrestling promoters have found ways to back out of match stipulations. And each time they do, it makes fans more leery, and less excited, about any high-stakes bout.



It didn't take long for The Authority to reclaim what they had lost at Survivor Series. The credibility of stipulation matches has been damaged to the point where they are no longer marketable, notes Al Castle.

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HAVE IT YOUR WAY

With their creation of the WWE Network and New Japan World, the two largest wrestling companies on the planet are counting on wrestling fans being ready, willing, and able to break from traditional viewing platforms.

But while NJPW and WWE have both gone “over the top,” other wrestling companies have doubled down on their bets that cable television is still the future. They include TNA, which in January debuted on its new home, Destination America, with several new shows in addition to its flagship, *Impact*.

Meanwhile, Ring of Honor’s parent company, Sinclair Broadcasting, is still relying on an even older business model of syndicating over local stations throughout the U.S.

Competing philosophies aside, this much is absolutely the case: More so than ever before, there’s no shortage of ways for fans to enjoy wrestling—whenever, wherever, and however they want.

IT KEEPS GOING AND GOING AND GOING AND...

In addition to featuring young, athletic talent that can’t be seen anywhere else, there’s a good reason newer wrestling television shows like *NXT* and *Lucha Underground* have captured the interest of disenfranchised WWE fans: They’re only an hour long.

With just 60 minutes to fill, those shows are able to feature their top stars, move storylines along, and deliver a satisfying main event, while still leaving fans wanting more.

It’s the antithesis of *Raw*, which, since moving to three hours-plus, has been loaded with filler, including unnecessarily long matches, too many bad comedy skits, and promos that seemingly go on forever.

If WWE can learn anything from smaller, boutique wrestling

TV shows, it’s that less really can be more.

WHEN YOU CARE ENOUGH TO SEND THE VERY BEST

Ring of Honor’s working relationship with New Japan has continued to pay dividends, as evidenced by its presence on the hugely successful Wrestle Kingdom 9 event.

The very first match of the pay-per-view featured Kyle O’Reilly and Bobby Fish defending their IWGP junior heavyweight tag team championship in a four-way. But, on their way to the ring, they also wore their ROH tag team title belts. As well, American announcers Jim Ross and Matt Striker repeatedly referenced the ROH roots of reDRagon, who scored the win in the bout.

Having the ROH brand and two of its top talents featured so prominently on one of the biggest wrestling shows in the world, gives the one-

time Philadelphia-based indy the kind of credibility that money can’t buy. And it helped give New Japan fans even more bang for their yen.

IS IT LIVE OR IS IT MEMOREX?

There’s another advantage that shows like *Lucha Underground* and even *Impact* have over *Raw*—the ability to post-produce.

While TNA’s model of taping several weeks of television, rather than airing live, may be driven by cost more than anything else, it’s also a blessing in disguise. By not having to worry about the myriad challenges that come with going live, including hitting commercial cues, time restraints, and the occasional blooper, TNA performers can focus on putting on the best show possible, and leave the rest to editors.

Even when the *Action is Total, Nonstop*, it’s good to be able to hit the pause button. □



The inclusion of reDRagon at Wrestle Kingdom 9 not only increased the attractiveness of the event, but also helped elevate Ring of Honor, where Kyle O'Reilly and Bobby Fish reign as tag team champs.

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the STRAIGHT SHOOTER

BY DAN MURPHY

NEW JAPAN PRO Wrestling is changing the pro wrestling landscape. Wrestle Kingdom 9 was a shot fired across the bow of the North American sports entertainment scene.

For the past few years, New Japan has been attracting devotees in North America. Co-promotional efforts with Ring of Honor, the NWA, and now Global Force Wrestling have helped introduce American fans to stars like Kazuchika Okada, Hiroshi Tanahashi, Shinsuke Nakamura, and The Bullet Club.

Wrestle Kingdom 9 was made available on pay-per-view in both Japan and the U.S. Within hours, animated GIFs and pirated video

were flooding the Internet. From message boards to websites to social media, everyone was talking about New Japan.

It reminded me of the early-1990s, when the Internet was still in its infancy. An exciting new regional promotion became the buzz of newgroups like rec.sport, pro.wrestling, and news sites like scoops.com. It was called Extreme Championship Wrestling.

Long before it landed a national TV gig, word of ECW spread online, as well as in the pages of *PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED*, which gave ECW a good deal of coverage back then. When ECW toured a town for the first time, they would find an audience that

already knew the names of Sabu, The Tazmaniac, and Public Enemy, but had never seen them live and in living color.

New Japan has the same feel today, and Wrestle Kingdom 9 was a significant effort at breaking through to the American market.

Matt Striker, who provided English language color commentary alongside the venerable Jim Ross, said the event had the feel of something truly special.

"I often heard my trainer, Johnny Rodz, talk about 'feeling a moment,' but the reality of that phrase never truly grasped me until one time I was in the ring across from The Undertaker," Striker said. "Time stood still. I felt that moment only a few times again in my career—at WrestleMania, teaming with William Regal, and at Wrestle Kingdom.

"Energy moves around, and the more it moves the warmer it becomes, which is odd because it also gives you chills," Striker said. "I think everyone in the Tokyo Dome on that night, from the floor sweeper to the main-eventers, knew the energy was special. It was undeniable."

It's hard to put a finger on



Hired by Global Force to call Wrestle Kingdom 9, Matt Striker and Jim Ross gave American fans the best possible perspective on what could prove to be a landmark event.



exactly what created the unique energy that definitely came through on the PPV broadcast. Part of it may have been Ross' commentary, which has been missing for far too long. Part of it may have been the incredible number of stars featured (more than 50 wrestlers took part in the event, not counting managers and corner men). Much of it may have been the anticipation of another classic in the series between IWGP champion Tanahashi and his rival Okada, or because of the incredible swagger and charisma of Nakamura.

In any case, *Wrestle Kingdom 9* had the big-time feel usually reserved for *WrestleMania*. With NJPW debuting on AXS TV in the U.S., it is entirely possible that New Japan might leapfrog both TNA and ROH to become the second-most-viewed promotion in the U.S. this year.

Maybe I'm making too much of one event, especially an event that only a fraction of casual wrestling fans in the U.S. watched. But I've seen this before. I've seen fans unhappy with the product being offered by the WWF (and WCW at the time) seek out bold alternatives. I've seen the Internet build a ground-

swell into a movement.

I've seen matches with incredible workrate and fresh faces capture the imagination and force a change in the status quo.

And so has Striker.

"With the world being so small, now is the perfect time for 'other promotions' to stake a claim to a piece of the pie," said Striker, who also regularly provides play-by-play commentary for *Lucha Underground*, a visionary lucha-themed promotion airing on the El Rey network. "Wrestlers that were once only lore or legend read about in print media are now accessible to any fan anywhere in the world through the Internet and social media."

Unlike ECW a generation ago, New Japan (and *Lucha Underground*, to a lesser degree) have money behind them, allowing them to do things only WWE has attempted. New Japan recently launched "New Japan World," a subscription-based streaming video service, similar to the WWE Network. Unlike WWE, which may have overhyped the Network on its initial release, New Japan has utilized a more conservative strategy for its network,

Prominent independent stars

are jockeying for attention with New Japan as well. For many wrestlers, NJPW is a more attractive option than TNA or ROH ... and for some, it's a more attractive option than WWE, as some New Japan stars reportedly have declined WWE developmental deals.

For the first time in years, *PWI* ran a feature on a New Japan event in this issue. As of this writing, Tanahashi and Nakamura are early candidates for the top spot in the 2015 "*PWI* 500."

There's a sense of change in the air.

"Between New Japan, *Lucha Underground*, and others, the style is being redefined, creating a new hybrid of pro wrestler," Striker said. "Evolution, growth, excitement, and intrigue. Right now reminds me of the mid-1980s, where there were territories and stars, and room for us all. From 1985-2002, great changes happened in the wrestling industry, and over the next 30 years, almost a dozen mega-stars and more money than the industry had ever seen emerged. It looks like history may be about to repeat itself."

If so, the significance of *Wrestle Kingdom 9* cannot be overstated. □

WIN, LOSE, or DRAW

BY HARRY BURKETT

THE OPENING CREDITS—featuring a nighttime view of the Los Angeles skyline—flash across the screen like the beginning of a sizzling telenovela. Two names in particular stand out—those of executive producers Mark Burnett and Robert Rodriguez. With two nonconformist Hollywood powerhitters like that, it's no surprise *Lucha Underground* is unlike any other wrestling show.

Burnett pioneered reality televi-

sion with *Survivor* and has gone on to produce *The Apprentice*, *The Voice*, *Shark Tank*, and *Are You Smarter Than A Fifth Grader?*. Rodriguez spearheaded the independent grindhouse movement, producing films that are almost parodies of 1960s and '70s exploitation movies, such as *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Sin City*, and *Machete*, in addition to the highly successful *Spy Kids* franchise.

Lucha Underground is exactly

what one would expect from a Burnett-Rodriguez collaboration. The unedited flow of wrestling matches, along with the spontaneity of play-by-play, provide the pseudo-reality feel that is a Burnett hallmark.

Otherwise, *Lucha Underground* is vintage Rodriguez. And that's as it should be, considering the program airs on the El Rey Network, which Rodriguez and Factory-Made Ventures launched in late-2013. I get a kick out of El Rey because a 16-year-old Rodriguez could have sat down in his bedroom and scribbled the channel's entire lineup on a piece of notebook paper back in the mid-1980s: Grindhouse movies on Fridays, a Godzilla marathon for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, lots of *Miami Vice* and *Starsky & Hutch* reruns, and, of course, *Lucha Libre*! In his critically acclaimed series, *The Director's Chair*, Rodriguez has interviewed fellow directors Quentin Tarantino, John Carpenter, and Guillermo del Toro—certainly a cinematic brain trust.

And, even if Rodriguez hasn't been involved in every aspect of *Lucha Underground*, the show reflects his techniques and tastes. "The Temple," as it's dubbed, is located in what looks like an abandoned warehouse in Boyle Heights, a predominantly Mexican-American neighborhood of Los Angeles. Suddenly, I'm having flashbacks to the old Sportatorium, located at 1000 South Industrial Boulevard in Dallas, Texas, which showcased Johnny Valentine, Jose Lothario, The Von Erichs, The Freebirds, Gino Hernandez, Chris Adams, Steve Austin, and countless other stars. Like the Sportatorium in Dallas, and Philly's Viking Hall at the corner of Swanson and Ritner, the Aztec Temple's electric atmosphere derives from the talent and fans, not big screens or pyro.

The point man on the *Lucha Underground* project is the third executive producer, Eric Van Wagenen, who works directly



For storyline purposes, the evil Dario Cueto is the owner of the *Lucha Underground* promotion. The power base of the *Lucha Underground* TV show on the El Rey Network is Emmy-award winning reality TV show magnate Mark Burnett and visionary film director Robert Rodriguez.

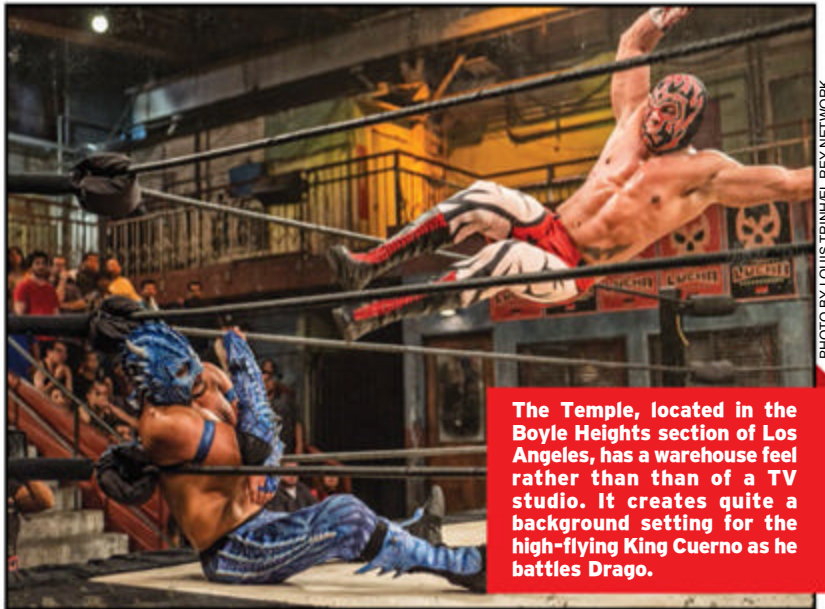
PHOTO BY LOUIS TRINH/EL REY NETWORK

under Burnett and has some experience working with WWE. “The idea was to bring a version of Lucha Libre to America that would cross over and be all-inclusive of wrestling fans ... so we started to put the pieces together,” Van Wagenen told *nerdist.com*. “We’ve brought in some Robert Rodriguez people to help us with some stuff, too, so it feels like a well-oiled television production, but it has elements of it that are very much film-like and Robert Rodriguez-like.”

In addition to the sleek opening credits, the show is on film, rather than tape. Each hour-long episode is action-packed, with backstage segments usually occurring in owner/promoter Dario Cueto’s office. These telenovela-like scenes could come straight out of *La Reina Del Sur*, with Cueto and Konnan speaking in menacing tones like rival cartel crimelords, except they’re talking about the chances of Prince Puma retaining the Lucha Underground championship, not cocaine trafficking.

I’m surprised Van Wagenen hasn’t really opened up the format, with Cortez Castro (Ricky Reyes), Bael (B-Boy) and Mr. Cisco snuffing out Big Ryck (Ezekiel Jackson) in an alley behind a Boyle Heights nightclub, or Sexy Starr hopping in a Ford Fiesta and chasing Chavo Guerrero down the Pomona Freeway.

But I hope he doesn’t do that. The Van Wagenen and the Rodriguez crew are trying to use the cinematic feel to accentuate the drama of Lucha Libre, not diminish it. Ninety percent of the program is focused on in-ring action, not backstage segments (taking note, WWE?). The production embraces Lucha Libre history and Aztec culture with focus on the costumes, the set, and the music. And play-by-play announcer Matt Striker and color commentator Vampiro aren’t content with telling stories; they call the action and draw from their own experiences (*gasp*, even



The Temple, located in the Boyle Heights section of Los Angeles, has a warehouse feel rather than that of a TV studio. It creates quite a background setting for the high-flying King Cuerno as he battles Drago.

PHOTO BY LOUIS TRINHEL REY NETWORK

mentioning WWE on occasion).

Purists should appreciate the concept, and I definitely do. After being overexposed to WWE and TNA over many years, *Lucha Underground* has been a welcome respite for me on Wednesday nights. I feel like a fan again. Will King Cuerno steamroll Prince Puma like he has everyone else? Will Drago’s ring performance ever be as threatening as his mask? My goodness, it’s terrific to see Chavo Guerrero and Johnny Mundo (formerly known as John Morrison) again, especially in a non-WWE environment.

Then the nagging critic part of me nudged fanboy aside. The cinematic presentation, especially the slickly produced backstage segments, makes me feel like a detached observer. It makes the wrestling seem less real, and I’m not participating in the show. Heck, I still feel that way whenever Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon plot their evil strategy in front of a backstage camera. *They’re telling me I’m not really here—I’m merely watching.* Wrestling produces a sort of as-it-happens intimacy that can’t be replicated by any other type of show, except other live-event sports or perhaps breaking news.

“Hacksaw” Jim Duggan, not

considered a philosopher-poet by any stretch, offered some insight into this during an interview with me in 2010. Commenting on a late-career run in WWE, Duggan noted, “Vince’s product on TV right now really isn’t a wrestling show. It’s a show *about* wrestling, like *Law & Order* is a show about police work.”

When Duggan broke into the business, wrestling consisted of a ring, two workers, a referee, a ring announcer, and some kid to ring the timekeeper’s bell. That was the essence of wrestling. Wrestlers cut promos; they didn’t memorize scripts. The WWE that Duggan experienced in 2005-09 was markedly different from the Mid-South or even the WWF in the 1980s.

I realize television production needs to evolve, but wrestlers should have direct connections to their fans. I think of “Diamond” Dallas Page grabbing the mic from Gene Okerlund’s hand on *WCW Monday Nitro*, pouring his heart and soul into the stationary camera before him, making eye-to-eye contact with the audience at home.

My advice to *Lucha Underground*: Forget the tense office scenes with Cueto and Konnan. Give me more sit-down interviews with Vampiro as the interviewer. I want to watch wrestling, not a show about wrestling!

PRESS CONFERENCE

EVERY ISSUE, REPORTERS FROM PWI PARTICIPATE IN AN INCISIVE PRESS CONFERENCE WITH A TOP WRESTLING STAR. THE QUESTIONS WILL BE DEMANDING, AND THE ANSWERS WILL REVEAL THE INNERMOST THOUGHTS OF THE GIANTS OF THE SPORT.

ALBERTO *el* PATRON

Alberto had instant success in WWE, topping a field of 40 and eliminating Santino Marella to win the 2011 Royal Rumble.



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

IN 2011, ALBERTO DEL RIO and CM Punk competed over the WWE championship. In 2015, they're competing over a different kind of title: most newsworthy ex-WWE employee.

Like Punk, the former Del Rio, now known as Alberto El Patron, left WWE last year on very bad terms, following a reported incident that involved Del Rio striking a WWE office worker for making an ethnically insensitive remark. Like Punk, Alberto's departure resulted in ugly litigation with WWE. And, like Punk, now that he's free and clear to pursue other career opportunities, Del Rio is not shy about speaking out against what he said was his mistreatment by WWE management.

The reasons for some of Alberto's frustrations were evident for anyone who followed the third-

generation Mexican star's rise and fall in WWE. Within months of debuting in the company, Alberto won the 2011 Royal Rumble and challenged for the World title at WrestleMania 27. Later that year, he won a Money in the Bank ladder match, and the first of four WWE world championships.

But by the time he was fired by WWE for "unprofessional conduct," Del Rio had already been reduced to an opening-match player. Now, Alberto says he's rediscovered his passion for the sport he grew up in. And, with prominent new roles in AAA, ROH, and the Mark Burnett-produced startup, Lucha Underground, Alberto says he's happier than he's been in a long time.

Still, as he made clear in an exclusive hour-long interview with **PWI** Senior Writer Al Castle, Alberto is not yet ready to forgive, nor forget.

Castle: Why don't I begin by asking you about the latest news, and that's you signing with Lucha Underground. Considering how respectful it is of the Mexican lucha tradition, it sounds like a perfect fit. Do you see it that way, too?

Alberto: Yeah, all my friends are already there, and other friends are coming to the company pretty soon. The other one is going to be a huge, big surprise for everybody, just like I was when I joined them. Everybody was in shock. As you know, other companies were trying to get me, but I decided to go there because, number one, the right people are there, and the lucha style is the style I started in 15 years ago. But what the company wants from me is to give the Lucha Underground fans that combination of the lucha style and the American style. And nobody else can do it the way I do it. Well, Rey [Mysterio Jr.] can do it, too. But we're the only two guys who can combine those styles in the ring.

Castle: What have you thought of the show so far? They don't treat it like you're watching a live sporting event, as much as a Mark Burnett-produced drama with three-camera shoots. It's an approach that I've never seen before, and I think it works.

Alberto: Yeah, I know it's different. They're trying to sell this like more of an action movie with lucha libre characters. They created their own characters and they're including some wrestlers. They have the right people behind this project and I'm pretty sure we're going to make some noise. We're making noise already.

Castle: How much was Ring of Honor on your radar while you were in WWE?

Alberto: They're fantastic. Of course I've heard about them and watched some of their shows. As you know, I was always on the road when I was working for WWE. I was doing 280, 290 shows per year. But every time I had the chance to watch their product, I did it, because I think it's one of the best products out there. And me being able to work for them was fantastic, because all those kids have a lot of talent. They're so creative. And once I was out of WWE, of course I was going to try to work for Ring of Honor.

Castle: It's interesting that you chose to work with Ring of Honor and Lucha Underground, which is still kind of an unproven product. But, if the stories that are out there are true, you didn't want to work with TNA. Why was that?

Alberto: I don't have anything but respect for TNA. They made a really good offer to me, and I'm really grateful for that. The reason I didn't go there is because those guys at Lucha Underground



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/RING OF HONOR





Retrieving the Money in the Bank briefcase in July 2011 (left) set Alberto up to cash in at SummerSlam and win the WWE title from CM Punk, who had been laid out in a sneak-attack by Kevin Nash. Though his victory was tainted, that didn't dampen the moods of Alberto and his personal ring announcer, Ricardo Rodriguez (right).

PHOTO BY JOHN SIMOLEK

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

helped me in all my legal proceedings against WWE. So I owed them that. It was not a matter of not wanting to go to TNA. It's just that Lucha Underground and AAA, they paid for my legal services. They introduced me to my lawyer. And the reason I'm working right now is because of them. WWE wanted me to stop working in the United States for a year. And that was going to happen if it wasn't for these guys. I'm a standup guy. If you help me, I'll return the favor one day. That's what I'm doing with them. Plus, they made me a good offer. The money was there. The proposal to join a good product with a good crowd was there, so I said yes. So of course when I said yes to the people at Lucha Underground, I called TNA and said, "Listen, thank you for the opportunity. Thank you for the offer. But I need to go here. I need to go with these guys because my friends are working over there. I know them already. And I owe these guys." If it wasn't for them, I would probably be working in Mexico, Japan, somewhere other than the States.

Castle: So they footed your

legal bill? That suggests that they really wanted you there and had been thinking about it for some time.

Alberto: They wanted me everywhere. They wanted me in Mexico and they wanted me here. They helped me because they wanted to have me in Mexico, and they said that would help me everywhere. So when they were doing that, I talked to the owner of AAA in Mexico and said, "Listen, I don't know where I'm going to go. I don't know if I want to stay just working in the indies or if I just want to take a year off in the States or if I want to go to TNA. So if you help me with this, it doesn't mean I have to go with you." And they said, "No, I'm doing this because I want to have you in Mexico. So if in the end you decide to go with us at Underground, fantastic. If you want to go to TNA, no problem. But we have a contract in Mexico and that's the place I want you right now. If you join us in the States, that would be great. But you're not forced to do it if you don't want to."

Castle: Who are you excited to

work with at Ring of Honor?

Alberto: All of them. To me it was an honor to have my first match at Ring of Honor with Christopher Daniels. To me, he's one of the best wrestlers in the world, and I was really happy to share a ring with him.

Castle: After all those years in WWE, is it refreshing to be working with a company that's so much more about the athleticism, and a good deal less about all the stuff outside the ring?

Alberto: Of course. I went back to my roots. I'm doing what I want. I'm enjoying and loving wrestling again. I'm not saying I was never happy in WWE. I had good moments and left good friends. But the fact is, now I'm deciding where I want to go and if I want to work one day or not. Nobody's forcing me to do or say anything that I don't want to say or do. Just the fact that I have that freedom makes my life happier and my job easier.

Castle: I'm not asking for any figures, but as far as money is concerned, is there a living to be made outside of WWE? Do you

"I'M DOING WHAT I WANT. I'M ENJOYING AND LOVING WRESTLING AGAIN."

-ALBERTO EL PATRON

stand to make as much as you did in WWE, or maybe more? Or is the reality that working outside of WWE means a big pay cut?

Alberto: Oh, no way. Not at all. Not for me, and not for people with talent. Probably for former WWE wrestlers who never reached the stage or the level I reached in WWE, Japan, or Mexico. It didn't matter where I worked, I was always a main-eventer. That situation is not my case, because I can tell you this: I'm doing pretty much the money I was doing in WWE in my good years. Last year was totally different. Last year is when I started to have issues with

somebody there, somebody important in that company. And that's when everything changed. So the money wasn't the same, and that's why I started thinking about not signing with them. Because at the end of the day—yes, we love this business, we have passion for this business—but we need to pay our bills. So that's the reason I wasn't happy over there. And I'd get phone calls from my friends from all over the world saying, "Hey, man, we're making this money down here in Mexico. And, brother, you and Rey are like God and the devil in wrestling here in Mexico. So you

guys could make two or three times what you're doing." And my friends in Japan would say the same. So that's when I started to think about leaving WWE. So for me, it's fantastic. To put a percentage, I'm doing like 90 percent of the money that I was doing in WWE, but doing only 100 shows per year. So the way I see it, I'm making more money.

Castle: And you mean 90 percent of your best years in WWE, which already had started to trail off, right?

Alberto: Yeah, because like I said, everything changed when this person came to the company, when this person and I started to have some issues. And I knew everything was going to change, because now they were operating a different way. And there was no money. There was money, of course, for Cena, for Show, for Randy. But all the other superstars are making \$500 per show. I mean, I was doing more than that 15 years ago when I started in Mexico. It's just ridiculous that a guy that's supposed to be a main-eventer in the so-called biggest pro wrestling company in the world is making just \$500 per show. It's just bad. So, of course there's life out of



Del Rio earned the wrath of the fans at Payback in June 2013 when he repeatedly targeted the head of World champion Dolph Ziggler, who had been on extended leave with a concussion. Alberto didn't care; he got what he had come for.



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

In Alberto's view, former rival Rey Mysterio Jr. is the only other man who can effectively combine the lucha and American styles. El Patrón hinted that we may soon see Mysterio in Lucha Underground.

WWE. If you have the talent, don't be afraid. Go somewhere else and make more money. Of course, WWE gave me a name, put me out there. I went from being a national superstar to being a global superstar. And I'm always going to be thankful to WWE for that. But, of course, they did it because I was giving them my heart and my soul every single night in the ring.

Castle: Your case is so different than so many others, because, as you said, you already were a main-event star, I imagine, making a good living before you entered WWE. So you knew there was life after WWE.

Alberto: Yes, of course. Actually, that's something I said to somebody over there when they tried to pay me \$800 for one show. I said, "Here you go. Here's your check. Probably, you need it more than I do. I was doing more money than this when I started 15 years ago in Mexico. I was somebody before you. And I'm going to be somebody the day I leave

WWE." Of course, they fixed it, because they knew I wasn't happy. And maybe they weren't happy because I was always complaining about the money. And they would always fix it. I'll give them credit for that. But it was my eternal battle. Every single week going to that office and complaining about the money and fighting for what was mine—my money for my hard work that I always did in the ring.

Castle: I think WWE management thinks, and somewhat rightfully so, that for any wrestler in the United States, whether it's an indy wrestler or somebody at TNA or Ring of Honor, the brass ring is to someday come to work for WWE. Do luchadors in Mexico look at it that way?

Alberto: Of course, everybody wants to get to WWE, because that's supposed to be the major leagues of pro wrestling. And that's the way it was when I started with them. When John Laurinaitis was in charge, everybody was making money—the

lower card guys, the mid-card guys, and, of course, the main-eventers. Everybody was making money. And that was the whole point of getting there—to finally get rewarded for all those years busting your ass in the gym and in little arenas or high school gyms. But, now those days are gone and it's just a few people making money over there.

Castle: Did your complaints lead them to cooling down your character? You were on a tear for your first couple of years. It seemed you could do no wrong. Months after coming in, you won the Royal Rumble, Money in the Bank, and the World title. And then the last year or so, clearly your position in the company dropped a lot.

Alberto: That's exactly what happened. You could see the difference from my first four years to my last two years. People don't have to be too smart to know that something happened that made everything change. Luckily for me, I'm a good wrestler. Everybody wants me to go places

because they know that I'm going to give them more than 100 percent. I have bookings all over the world. I've been back to Mexico. And there's nobody bigger than me in Mexico. Wait, no, no, no. Rey is the number one in Mexico, and I'm second. Rey is like God. But besides Rey, there is nobody bigger in Mexico. We are celebrities—real celebrities. We're probably more popular than the president. So I have that in my favor. And here in the United States, I made a name. They know I'm a good worker, and that's the reason organizations like Ring of Honor invited me to go to their company.

Castle: It's got to be heartwarming for you to be embraced by that kind of fan. The Ring of Honor fan is a very discerning, discriminating kind of fan. Not everybody from WWE could come into ROH and be welcomed in. But they immediately took to you.

Alberto: That tells you everything. They appreciate when you

give them your best in the ring. They know who is a real wrestler and who is just here to get a payday. And they appreciate when you bust your ass in the ring for all of them. And I've been doing that my entire career. So to me it was an amazing feeling that day in Nashville with Ring of Honor.

Castle: Putting aside the incident that led to you leaving WWE, did you have issues with their portrayal of Hispanic characters, either when you were there or before you arrived? I think of Juventud Guerrera riding to the ring on a lawn mower, and taking two Puerto Rican wrestlers, in the Colons, and making them matadors.

Alberto: Not really, because they don't know the Latin culture. I don't think they care about the Latin culture. It's the nature of our business. They're always going to have us doing things that we don't want to. We all can say no at the end of the day. That's what they're going to say: "We're not forcing

anybody to do anything. We're paying them and that's why they're doing it." But there's a big difference when you're just playing a character and when those types of things go on backstage. That's something that I will never let happen again. And when it happened, that's why I spoke up.

Castle: There's a lot of similarities between your situation and CM Punk's. Hearing you talk about some of your money issues reminds me of Punk's stories on Colt Cabana's podcast. The other similarity is that both of you stood up to WWE. Do you wish you saw more people stand up?

Alberto: I don't think that's going to happen, because nobody wants to lose his job. We all have families or a goal in life. We want to save money. It's a difficult situation. I did it, because I was thinking of not staying with them, and I knew I was going to be fine outside of WWE. That's the reason I didn't think twice about fighting for my rights and



Both Alberto and CM Punk have made news for their honest appraisals of life in WWE. A former (and possible future) MMA practitioner, El Patron believes Punk can succeed in UFC.

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



fighting for my beliefs. But maybe six years ago when I started, if an incident like that would have happened, I don't know if I would have done the same thing. Everything in life is timing. In my case, I have three little babies. And, in the moment that happened, I was like, "I'm going to teach my kids that they have to fight for their beliefs." Plus, I knew I could go somewhere else. If it wasn't for that, maybe I would have stayed, because I have to feed my family. I don't know.

Castle: When WWE gave you the babyface push, it seemed like that could have been something really special. But they never really committed to it. Do you look back and see a missed opportunity there?

Alberto: I was never happy with that, since the beginning. I didn't like the way they were writing the stories. It's funny. Now everybody's talking about how passionate I am when I'm doing my promos in Ring of Honor and the House of Hardcore in Philly and all those other places. And all I can say is that you can feel the passion and the love because that's who I am. That's me. That's the real Alberto. In the other place, I never said anything because I wanted to. And if, for some reason, I changed one line, they were all mad and would be

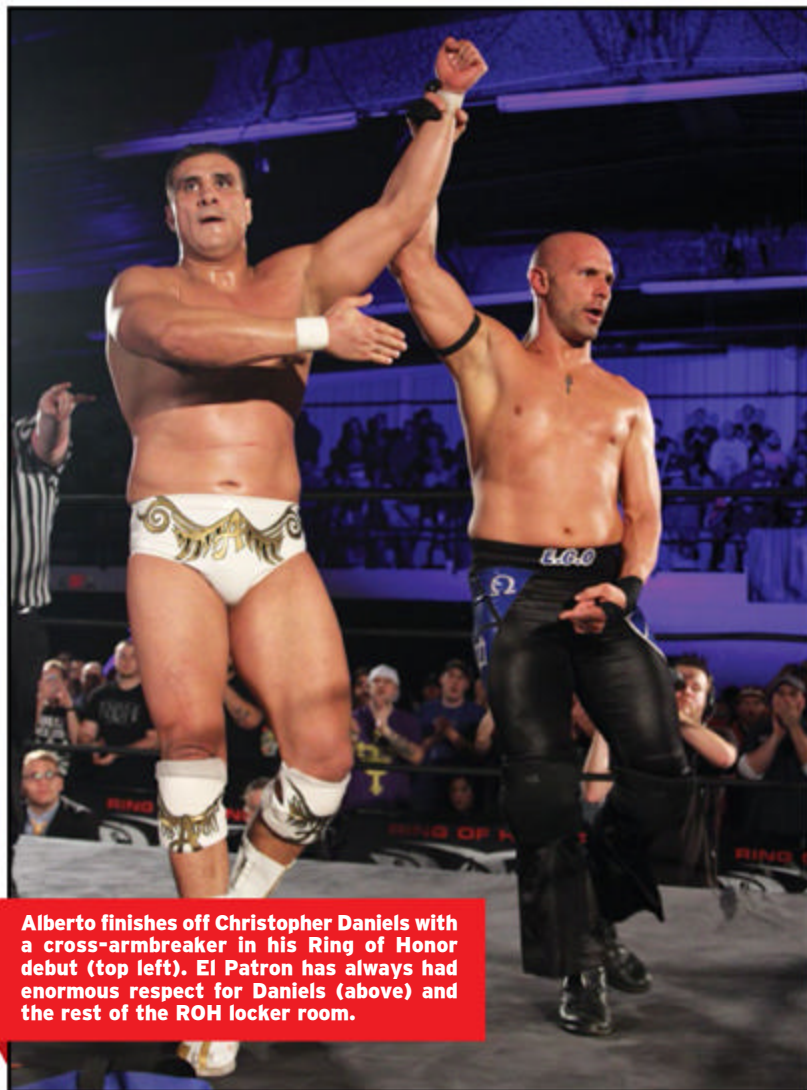
fining me. So people need to understand, when you work for that place, you are like a robot. You need to do exactly what they say and how they say it.

Castle: You would get fined for changing a line in a promo?

Alberto: You could get fined over everything.

Castle: That's interesting. I don't know if you heard Vince McMahon's interview with Steve Austin where he talked about the lack of ambition in the locker room and the younger generation not reaching for the brass ring. When you hear something like that, it tells you why maybe they aren't reaching for it. They're terrified to do anything other than exactly what they're told to do.

Alberto: That's exactly how it is. Everybody is terrified. We all were—or they are—terrified of changing something or trying something new. Of course there



Alberto finishes off Christopher Daniels with a cross-armbreaker in his Ring of Honor debut (top left). El Patron has always had enormous respect for Daniels (above) and the rest of the ROH locker room.

PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/RING OF HONOR



Alberto poses on the set of El Rey Network's *Lucha Underground*. He feels a sense of obligation to LU and Mexico's AAA, who helped free him from WWE's no-compete contract clause.

PHOTO COURTESY OF EL REY NETWORK

are some exceptions who can do and say whatever they want. But that rule doesn't apply to 90 percent of the wrestlers.

Castle: The other obvious comparison to CM Punk that a lot of people are talking about is your MMA roots. Is that something you're seriously considering returning to?

Alberto: There's some offers out there. But I don't want to go back to MMA, because, number one, I'm making money in pro wrestling. And I'm 37 years old right now. I don't know if that's something that I really want to do. I will do it if the right money is there. So far, all the offers are good, but they're not so spectacular as to make me go back to the MMA world. I've been saying this since the first offer came: If you make me the right offer, I will do it. I'll just need time to train

and get back into fighting shape. I'm not saying that if I go back I'm going to have 10 or 20 fights. Of course not. I don't think I have the age to do that. But I would do it for the right amount of money, and probably just two or three fights and that's it.

Castle: With CM Punk trying his hand in UFC, there are some people saying that there's nothing about pro wrestling that is any kind of advantage in MMA. Do you see it differently?

Alberto: We're athletes. I know CM Punk has been training for a while. And he has a good team backing him up. So why not? Nobody started out knowing how to fight. All you need is the heart and the skills. And if CM Punk's team already saw that he has the skills and is a real athlete, then why not? If the offer is there and he feels he can do it, why

not? I'm pretty sure he's going to be okay. I hope he does well, because he is my friend.

Castle: And maybe a future opponent? Can you make 185?

Alberto: Maybe if I cut off both of my legs (*laughs*).

Castle: Do you look back on everything that happened and think that it was all meant to be—that it all worked out for the better? You're making good money. You're still on national television. And you get to be home with your family.

Alberto: I would not say that everything worked well in the end, because what WWE did to me was wrong. It was pretty bad. I still think about that today, because it wasn't fair. I'm pretty sure they could have done it in a different way. That's in the past, but it was wrong. I'm fine right now, but I'll never be happy with how my story with WWE ended. □

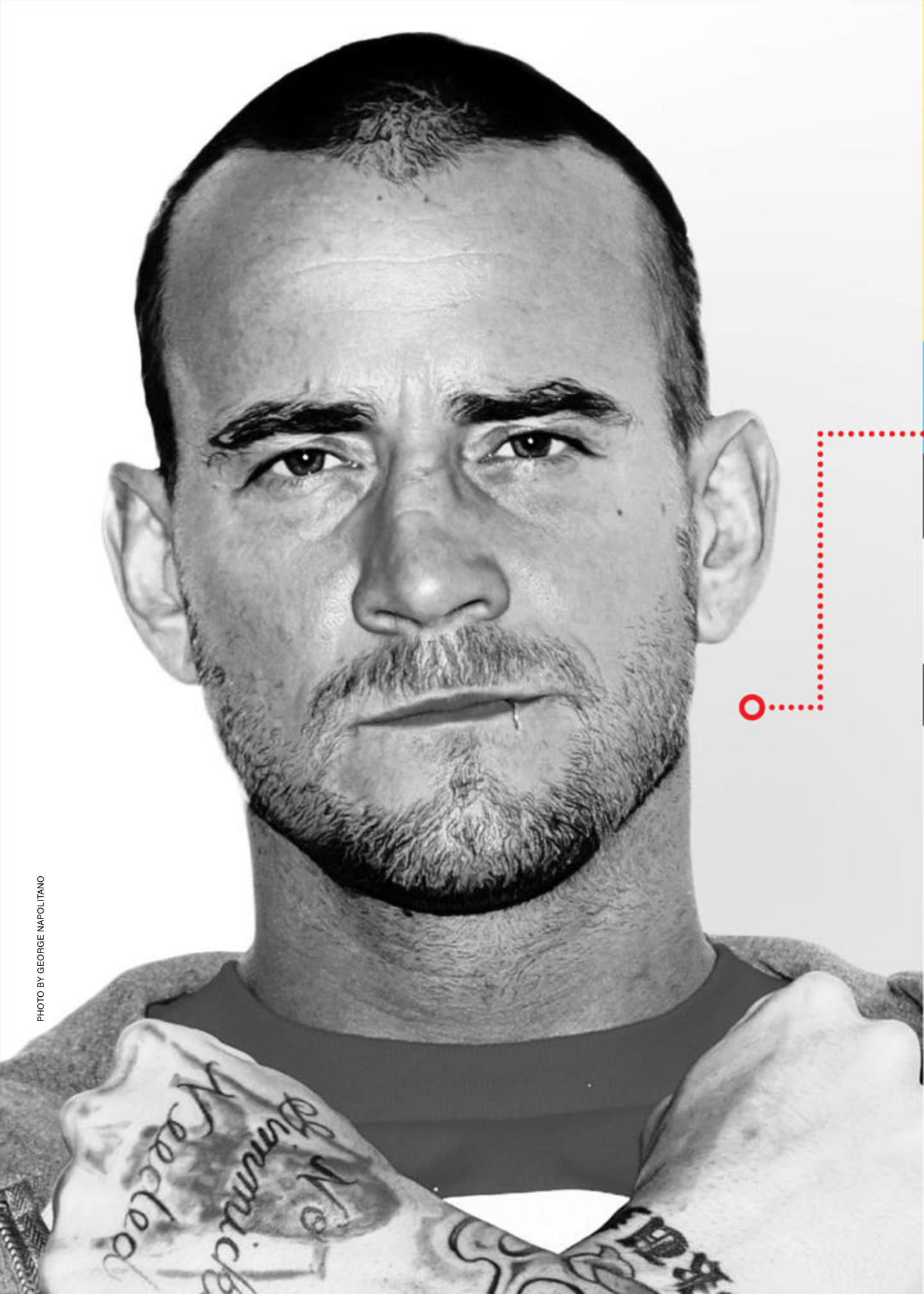


PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

the ULTIMATE QUESTION:

HOW WILL CM PUNK

FARE IN MMA?

Dan Severn may not know the man well, but as a former NWA and UFC champion, he's in a unique position to discuss CM Punk's transition from wrestling to MMA

TEXT BY DAN SEVERN (AS TOLD TO LOUIE D)

SINCE CM PUNK announced that he was joining UFC, many people have asked me how I think he'll fare inside the Octagon. To be completely honest, I don't really know CM Punk all that well, so when people ask me that question, I can't necessarily give them a detailed answer.

One thing I do know, though, is how to succeed in both UFC and professional wrestling, and as Punk starts his preparation, he has two key advantages in his favor, the biggest of which is simply his history as a WWE superstar of great magnitude.

I've fought all over the world, winning more than

100 fights inside a cage and multiple major championships inside the squared circle, and I know what it's like to fight six or seven times a week. Punk does, too, and in the current MMA scene, his background can only help him, especially as it relates to conditioning.

When someone fights only a handful of times a year, he'll have the ability to properly train and prepare for 15 minutes of maximum effort. However, what you might not realize is that Punk, like all professional wrestlers, is used to working hurt and doing so more often than not, so if and

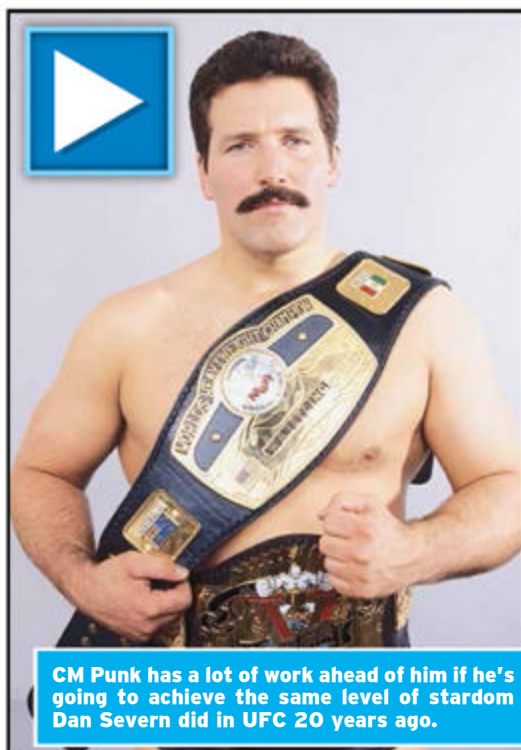


PHOTO BY JASON ROSS LAVIN

when there's a time—in training or in a fight itself—where he's less than 100 percent, he can draw upon his past in dealing with it.

Truthfully, of all the disciplines I've competed in, I've been hurt worse during my amateur wrestling career than I ever was in professional wrestling or in cage fighting. In fact, out of those three disciplines, Ultimate Fighting was the easiest for me to do! That may seem like a contradiction given the nature of that beast, but it's true.

The other advantage that wrestling may have given Punk is what you'd call being a "ring general."



PHOTO BY JASON ROSS LAVIN

Many of the moves Severn perfected as an amateur wrestler and later in the pros translated well to the Octagon against such stars as Anthony Macias in 1994.

To me, there are techniques and there are tactics in cage fighting, and I was one of the first to utilize the tactic of using the cage wall in my favor. You

were allowed to grab the fence when I was fighting, so whenever I'd get into a cage, I'd always inspect it to see how solid it was. The posts were obviously the hardest, but I would test the wall to see how much it would give and where (and how) I could best use the cage to my advantage.

You can't grab the fence anymore, but current fighters are starting to utilize that cage wall again. Whether it's as a springboard—stepping up on it to throw headkicks, superman punches, or flying knees—or as a defensive tactic to get into position for a submission, it's all the same. In a way, it's almost like using the ropes in a wrestling ring as an offensive advantage instead of a boundary, and Punk should be very adept at that.

Now, with all that said, Punk of course faces some key disadvantages, too. There are two big ones in my mind, one of which is something many have already brought up: age.

Punk turns 37 in 2015, and in his defense, I was 36 years old myself when I first competed in UFC back in 1994. But if I can be honest, I felt like I was almost a decade past my prime as an amateur wrestler when I started in UFC; I consider that era "Dan Severn residue," because from 1984-86, I ruled the world as an



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

Punk's always included submission holds in his pro wrestling playbook, which is a plus. Severn feels, however, that his age, 37, will work against him. Punk's SummerSlam 2013 opponent, Brock Lesnar, was 29 when he made his UFC debut.

amateur wrestler, and by the time I got to UFC, I thought I'd already be retired.

Age can be overcome, but I think the game has changed so much since the beginning of UFC, and the quality of athletes has risen so much that, honestly, he'd have had a bet-

ter chance in the early days than he does now. UFC in its beginnings was like the Wild West, with multiple disciplines clashing, no weight classes, and only two rules. But whether you were a grappler or a striker, you quickly learned you had to be adept enough at both

to succeed. With limited experience in one realm and limited time to make up for it, can Punk do that on the fly? Maybe, but in a young man's game, he's behind the eight-ball already.

His other big disadvantage, one you may not realize, is a three-letter word: WWE.

For one thing, because people have seen the success that Brock Lesnar and others have had in the Octagon, Punk instantly has an unfair comparison to live up to. See, most of those guys were heavyweights, and in MMA, like in boxing and wrestling, there's a big difference in fighting styles among different weight classes. People like to see the heavyweights, but it's the lighter weights who are exerting the most energy and it's in that middle ground where there's the most competition, so Punk's facing a double-edged sword there.

And, because of his wrestling success, Punk is an "outsider" and will have a bull's-eye on his back. I remember in my amateur days seeing some of the better guys wearing pink singlets, because they knew it was a blow to your ego to lose to a guy in a pink singlet. In Punk's case, opponents may put in a little more effort when fighting him because they don't want to be the guy who lost to a wrestler.

In summation, I really can't predict just how well CM Punk will fare in UFC. I do, however, hope that he truly understands what is in his grasp and is willing to put in the work it takes to succeed.

He'll only be as successful as he prepares himself to be, and what he gets out of his UFC career will solely be determined by how much he puts into it. In the end, only he can make or break himself. □

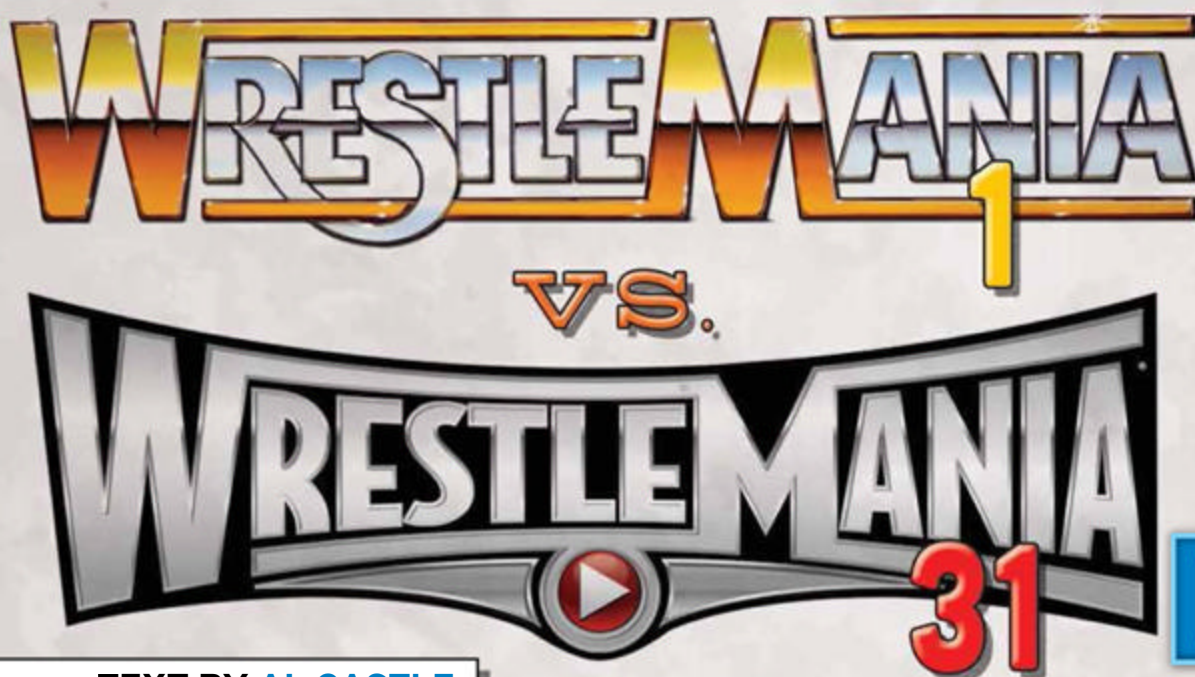
Visit Dan Severn's website at www.dansevern.com

Punk won't be able to run his opponents into the cage during UFC fights, but he will be able to use the cage as a springboard for his attacks.



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

A DREAM CARD
30 YEARS
IN THE MAKING:



TEXT BY **AL CASTLE**

There are fans who would pay to see **John Cena vs. Hulk Hogan** right now. But how great would that match have been if Hogan were 31, rather than 61? The most popular wrestling card in 1985 was *WrestleMania*; the most popular movie was *Back to the Future*. Rev up the DeLorean!

RANDY ORTON HAD not yet entered kindergarten when his dad, “Cowboy” Bob, inadvertently knocked out “Mr. Wonderful” Paul Orndorff, leading to Hulk Hogan and Mr. T getting the win in the main event of the inaugural *WrestleMania* in 1985.

Three decades later, the younger Orton finds himself among WWE’s elder statesmen, as a locker room filled with youthful stars prepares to do battle

in the 31st installment of wrestling’s biggest event.

But what if, somewhere backstage in Levi Stadium, there existed a wormhole that would allow the stars of *WrestleMania 31* to travel back in time and face off against the stars of *WrestleMania 1*?

On the odd chance of such a phenomenon, the staff of *PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED* came up with this recommended lineup, and some predictions.

JOHN CENA vs. HULK HOGAN

THE MATCHUP:

Heck, we wouldn't mind seeing modern-day Hogan stand across a ring from John Cena at WrestleMania. But having both WWE standard-bearers lock up during their primes would be nothing short of epic. Fans in attendance would be well-advised to bring ear plugs, as the combined cheers for both men (and boos for Cena) could do some damage.

THE OUTCOME:

Even though Cena's reign atop WWE has now lasted longer than Hogan's did in the 1980s and early-1990s, the fact is "The Hulkster" was downright unbeatable in 1985, and wouldn't suffer his first clean pinfall title loss for another five years. We expect Hogan would dodge a Five-Knuckle Shuffle and crush Cena's massive pectorals with his signature legdrop to get the victory.



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

ROMAN REIGNS vs. KING KONG BUNDY

THE MATCHUP:

Long before the WWE machine was grooming Roman Reigns to headline a WrestleMania, it was doing the same for the "Walking Condominium." Dressed in black and sporting arsenals that were all about maximum impact, these two powerhouses would both be swinging for the fences.

THE OUTCOME:

Like fans saw in Bundy's WrestleMania 1 match against S.D. Jones, a nine-second squash match would not surprise us in this bout. Only, we expect it would come as the result of a Super Man Punch to a bald skull that would flatten the very round Bundy.

MIKE ROTUNDO & BARRY WINDHAM vs. JIMMY & JEY USO

THE MATCHUP:

When we say "Rotund!" you say "O!" As thrilling as the Usos are today, few teams in WWE history could get fans off their feet more than the flag-waving U.S. Express. The battle of two-time tag team champs could very well steal the show.

THE OUTCOME:

As talented as Windham and Rotundo were individually, their partnership wouldn't last into 1986. So it's hard to picture them overcoming the well-oiled machine that is the Usos. The match would bring fans to their feet for most of its 10 minutes.

"ROWDY" RODDY PIPER vs. DEAN AMBROSE

THE MATCHUP:

You would have been hard-pressed to find a WWE wrestler more unhinged and unpredictable than Roddy Piper. That is, until Dean Ambrose came along. Fans shouldn't expect anything in the way of finesse in a match between these two wild-eyed brawlers, which would almost necessitate a no-disqualification stipulation.

THE OUTCOME:

Ambrose would surely take more risks to inflict punishment on his opponent, but "Hot Rod" had a much better track record of avoiding defeats, even if meant relying on his "Ace," Orton, at ringside. It likely wouldn't be pretty, or legal, but Piper would find a way to pull out the win.



Take Roman Reigns and Seth Rollins out of the photo, eliminate 30 birthdays from Roddy Piper's timeline, and you're left with a battle of loons, "The Lunatic Fringe" vs. "The Rowdy Scot."

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RICKY "THE DRAGON" STEAMBOAT vs. SETH ROLLINS

THE MATCHUP:

In 1985, Steamboat was a thrilling wrestler in his prime, with superior conditioning that seemed a lock to one day wear a world championship. In 2015, much the same could be said about Rollins. This would be an instant Match of the Year candidate.

THE OUTCOME:

With both competitors so evenly matched in the ring, the difference would come down to mindset. Steamboat, with his warrior spirit and hyper focus, would be on the lookout for an opportunity to roll up his cocky opponent for the surprise pinfall.

ANDRE THE GIANT vs. BROCK LESNAR



Andre the Giant and Brock Lesnar would be practically the same age for this hypothetical matchup, but Lesnar has so much more fuel in the tank than Andre at age 37. Incidentally, Andre's WM 1 victim, Big John Studd, was also 37 in 1985.

THE MATCHUP:

If ever a match deserved Gorilla Monsoon's description of "the irresistible force meeting the immovable object," it's this one. Lesnar spent 2014 tossing his opponents around like rag dolls, but surely would not be able to do so against the 7-foot, 500-pound "Eighth Wonder Of The World." Andre could handle big men, but he rarely faced anyone with Lesnar's mix of strength and speed.

THE OUTCOME:

Although it would be another two years before WWE fans would see Andre beaten cleanly at WrestleMania 3, he never faced anyone as brutal as the "Beast Incarnate," and was already well past his prime by 1985. As unthinkable as it may sound, we envision Lesnar hoisting Andre up on his shoulders and sending him crashing down to the mat with an F5 for the win. Andre might stand a better chance in a bodyslam challenge.

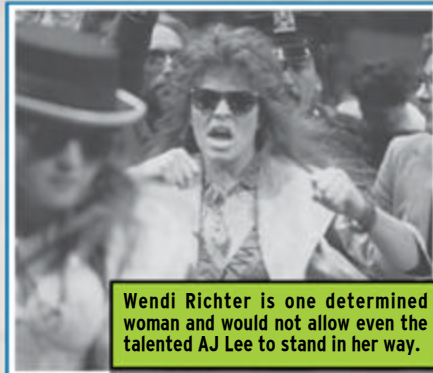
WENDI RICHTER vs. AJ LEE

THE MATCHUP:

The 1980s version of a WWE Diva would be stiff competition for *PWI's* 2014 Woman of the Year, especially with Cyndi Lauper in her corner. Maybe AJ could even the odds by having a certain UFC prospect seconding her. Richter's efforts would be buoyed by the rabid support of the fans.

THE OUTCOME:

AJ may have a deeper wrestling repertoire than Richter ever did, but you'd be hard-pressed to find a wrestler, male or female, with more heart than the neon-wearing Texas girl. As she did with Leilani Kai, Richter might roll through an AJ diving cross-body to get the pinfall.



Wendi Richter is one determined woman and would not allow even the talented AJ Lee to stand in her way.

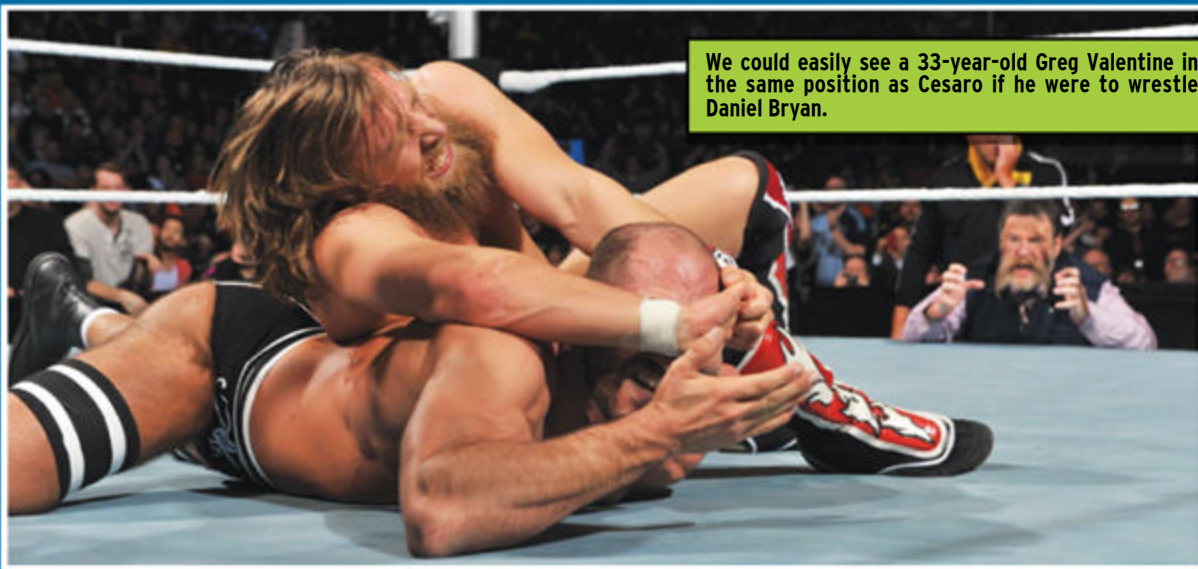
BRAY WYATT vs. DAVID SAMMARTINO

THE MATCHUP:

It may sound like an odd pairing, but the two burly, second-generation competitors have more in common than you might think. But, unlike Bruno Sammartino, we're thinking Bray's dad wouldn't be at ringside, seeing as how he'd be busy preparing for the Usos.

THE OUTCOME:

Sammartino may not get a chance to meet Bray's dad, but he'd surely become acquainted with his Sister Abigail. Though voted Rookie of the Year in 1981, David wouldn't have the experience to deal with the psychological mastery of Wyatt.



We could easily see a 33-year-old Greg Valentine in the same position as Cesaro if he were to wrestle Daniel Bryan.

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DANIEL BRYAN vs. GREG "THE HAMMER" VALENTINE

THE MATCHUP:

This battle of two mat technicians, separated by three decades, could be a scientific masterpiece. The only thing louder than the potential "Yes!" chants would be the ringside squawking from Valentine's megaphone-wielding manager, Jimmy Hart.

THE OUTCOME:

It could come down to this simple question: What hurts more? The figure-four leglock or the Yes Lock? We'd bet on the latter, and on "The Hammer" submitting. ("Tapping out" wouldn't be invented for several more years.)

***BEAT DOWN BY
HIS OWN FEARS:***

WHAT ***LASHLEY***

MUST DO TO RISE AGAIN



Why would someone as formidable as Bobby Lashley need MVP? Powerful, tough, and technically gifted, Lashley is nevertheless plagued by self-doubt. It's actually a common phenomenon in pro wrestling

TEXT BY HARRY BURKETT

PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

HE'S ALWAYS BEEN the quiet man. He's often seen sitting in the corner on a locker room bench, maybe rustling through his duffle bag. He's very inconspicuous.

But is Bobby Lashley considered a loner? Arrogant? Unapproachable?

Not really, and most people who have encountered Lashley over his 15-year wrestling career describe the same man: When approached, he's quick to offer a broad smile, a quick clasp of the hand, or an earnest "Good to see ya." Whatever success he's achieved, that's just the way he's always been.

After winning three collegiate wrestling championships and becoming a four-time All-American at Missouri Valley College, the 6'4" and 273-pound Lashley continued his amateur wrestling career in the U.S. Army, which emphasized proper conduct and strict discipline. He became a two-time Armed Forces champion and a silver medalist at the Conseil International du Sport Militaire World Championships.

His accomplishments speak for themselves. There's no need to boast.

So why was Lashley hanging around a big mouth like MVP?

"I've been scratchin' my head about that one," said Jeff Hardy, rubbing his chin in deep thought. "That was not the Lashley I knew. The Lashley I knew was uncompromised. Lashley didn't need to turn heel, because he was successful the way he was."

Most fans remember Lashley from WWE. He was perhaps the greatest champion of the WWE-owned ECW. He represented Donald Trump against Vince McMahon's Umaga in the "Battle Of The Billionaires" at WrestleMania 23. Trump didn't even need to spend a billion to buy Lashley—and McMahon's money didn't intimidate him.

Lashley wasn't going to double-cross Trump. No one questioned his ethics.

After a four-year absence, Lashley delighted TNA fans by answering Ethan Carter III's open challenge. He had picked up where he left off: shutting up big mouths. And he didn't seem to be making a great sacrifice either ... because he did it so effortlessly.

That's why the entire TNA roster was stunned when Lashley, seem-

ingly coming to the rescue of then-World champ Eric Young, instead speared E.Y. and joined the champ's attackers, MVP and Kenny King. He defeated Young for the World title on June 19 and reigned as champion until his hard-fought loss to Bobby Roode on September 18. Lashley regained the belt from Roode on January 7, thanks to surprise interference by Young, who smashed Roode with a steel chair and joined MVP's Beat Down Clan.



Lashley was able to reclaim the TNA World title from Bobby Roode in January, but the win was tainted by the interference of then-stablemate Eric Young. MVP infuriated Lashley by saying the Beat Down Clan owned the title collectively.



Lashley can be a sweet, gentle man, but anger him, as BDC member Kenny King did, and the result is a back driven to the canvas at ultra high force.

During an *Impact Wrestling* taping the following night, MVP took too much credit for Lashley's second TNA World title victory. Lashley admonished MVP by saying he alone was responsible for his own success. MVP didn't care for Lashley's public disrespect, and a rejuvenated BDC—including Kenny

King, Samoa Joe, Low-Ki, and Young—attacked the champion at the end of the show.

Lashley could have had an ally in Kurt Angle, who had his own issues with the Beat Down Clan. Angle wanted to form an alliance with Lashley, but at that point Bobby wasn't in the mood to trust

anyone, and it cost him. He wound up losing the World title to Angle on January 31.

"We're all glad he's away from MVP, but he didn't storm out of the BDC on our account," said Hardy. "It looked to me like he was thrown out. I still respect the man, though. I don't think any of us lost complete respect for him."

That's because few believed Lashley had actually become a bad guy. He desperately wanted to be TNA World champion. He thought MVP was showing him respect, and he didn't question what MVP was telling him.

"I've seen it over and over again in this business," mused Hardy. "A guy will show up with tremendous physical attributes, but some leech will sink his teeth into him. Maybe MVP told Lashley everything he wanted to hear. Maybe he played into his insecurities. Lashley didn't need MVP. And everybody could see it but him. Isn't that weird?"



The Beat Down Clan subdues Lashley, but it could not steal his championship. Kurt Angle was able to accomplish the feat, fair and square.



Lashley would be wise to start making some friends to watch his back. TNA can be a very dangerous place, with Young, Samoa Joe, MVP, Low-Ki, and King unchecked.

Hardy is right. That seems to be a pattern in the wrestling business. Perhaps that's why Brock Lesnar thinks he needs Paul Heyman ... why The Road Warriors needed Paul Ellering ... why Lex Luger needed James J. Dillon and The Four Horsemen ... why Ahmed Johnson needed The Nation of Domination ... and why Mark Henry needed Tony Atlas. And think of the seemingly invincible physical specimens who often flamed out due to self-destructive behavior: Sid Vicious, The Ultimate Warrior, John Nord.

How could anyone with the ability to clothesline an opponent into a 360-degree revolution possibly go wrong in the wrestling business? Somehow, they find a way.

Longtime TNA announcer Mike Tenay thinks he knows why a physical colossus like Lashley might feel insecure. "Consider this," he said. "Lashley dominated

in collegiate wrestling. He's gone 12 wins, 2 losses in MMA. When it comes to pure athleticism, Lashley is a steam locomotive. When it comes to wrestling, who can survive Lashley's running powerslam, his spear, his dragon sleeper, or even his right hand? No one.

"But there's a lot more to pro wrestling than an effective military press or suplex. That will win matches, but it won't necessarily get you the main event, championship bouts, or even on TV. One could say Lashley lacks charisma, but I think he makes up for that in physical presence. I think, coming back after four years, Lashley had a spasm of self-doubt. He saw MVP with marketability, with self-assurance, with mic skills, and with a game plan. Maybe Lashley lacked in those areas. But here's an important distinction: MVP hasn't been able to win the TNA World title, and Lashley has not only won the title,

but was able to defend it rather handily. Lashley is already a headliner. He just needs to focus on his work in the ring, which he can do very well."

Leave it to "The Professor" to put it in perspective. But can Lashley redeem his reputation? Can he repair his former relationships?

"I'd have to be persuaded that Lashley is his own man, that he knows his core," said Hardy. "Right now, to me, he's a weapon of mass destruction, whether he's controlled by MVP or fueled on by the fans. He's on my side this week, but will he be next week? He needs to explain his motivations."

For once, Lashley's actions in the ring won't be good enough. He'll have to shed the quiet-man image and talk to us ... clearly, passionately, and repeatedly. He must convince us that he will not let another big mouth speak for him again. □

WRESTLE KINGDOM 9



OPENING WESTERN EYES TO THE WONDERS OF NEW JAPAN

TEXT BY DAN MURPHY // PHOTOS ©2015 NEW JAPAN PRO-WRESTLING, LTD.

FOR NEARLY A quarter-century, January 4 has been recognized as the biggest date on the Japanese wrestling calendar. The event that takes place on that date each year, Wrestle Kingdom, is the Japanese version of WrestleMania, with the biggest feuds in Japan's biggest promotion settled on the biggest stage. The January 4 New Japan Pro Wrestling event has drawn as many as 63,000 fans to the Tokyo Dome in the past, but none was more significant than the most recent, Wrestle Kingdom 9.

This year, the event was targeted to an international audience, available on pay-per-view not only in Japan, but (in conjunction with Global Force Wrestling) in the U.S. as well, with Jim Ross and Matt Striker brought on board to provide English commentary.

With an announced crowd of 36,000 fans and a packed card of 10 matches (including six championship matches), Wrestle Kingdom had a distinct major-league atmosphere and came through with stellar performances with talent that is finally getting its just due globally.

Ross raved about the event on his blog, calling the show "a fan's dream."

"The final three bouts of the show were as good as I can recall broadcasting in years," Ross wrote. "Great in-ring psychology, a logical pace, uniqueness from match to match, physicality to an almost uncomfortable degree to watch, and crisp execution. They reminded me somewhat of the WrestleMania 25 bout between HBK and Undertaker, Bret Hart vs. Stone Cold at WrestleMania 13, and a handful of Flair-Steamboat bouts. Emotion, execution, and energy all in place with that magnificent, New Japan physicality."

The event featured several names familiar to U.S. fans, including AJ Styles, Jeff Jarrett, and ROH tag team champions reDRagon, but Wrestle Kingdom was truly a showcase for the stars of New Japan, including Intercontinental champion Shinsuke Nakamura, IWGP champion Hiroshi Tanahashi, rising star Kota Ibushi, and former IWGP champion Kazuchika Okada.

Here's how it went down:

PRE-SHOW:

15-MAN ROYAL RUMBLE

This nostalgia-filled bout included The Great Kabuki, Jushin Liger, Tiger Mask, and Taka Michinoku. It was won by two-time former IWGP champion Yuji Nagata, last eliminating Yoshi-Hashi.

**WINNER: YUJI
NAKATA IN
26:09**

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONS REDRAGON vs. THE YOUNG BUCKS vs. THE TIME-SPLITTERS vs. FOREVER HOOLIGANS



Fish applies a wristlock on KUSHIDA as reDRagon successfully defends its IWGP junior heavyweight tag team title in a four-way scramble.

**WINNERS:
REDRAGON
BY PINFALL
IN 13:01**

It was exactly the sort of fast-paced, frenetic bout one might expect from these four teams, and it brought the usually reserved Japanese fans to their feet multiple times. Kyle O'Reilly and Bobby Fish managed to defy the odds and successfully defended their junior heavyweight tag title when they connected with their Chasing the Dragon brainbuster on Rocky Romero for the win.

HIROYOSHI TENZAN, SATOSHI KOJIMA, & TOMOAKI HONMA vs. BAD LUCK FALE, JEFF JARRETT, & YUJIRO TAKAHASHI

Live by the guitar, die by the guitar. Jarrett attempted to hit Honma with the instrument, but accidentally connected with his own partner, Takahashi. Honma then connected a headbutt off the top rope on Jarrett for the win.

**WINNERS: TENZAN,
KOJIMA, AND
HONMA BY PINFALL
IN 5:35**

MIKEY NICHOLLS, SHANE HASTE, NAOMICHI MARUFUJI, & TORU YANO VS. DAVEY BOY SMITH JR., LANCE ARCHER, SHELTON BENJAMIN, & TAKASHI IIZUKA

WINNERS: NICHOLLS, HASTE, MARUFUJI, & YANO BY PINFALL IN 5:05

The shortest match of the night was a six-man battle between New Japan regulars and visitors from Pro Wrestling NOAH. Marufuji, the reigning NOAH GHC champ, scored the pinfall after a running kneestrike on Iizuka.

KAZUSHI SAKURABA VS. MINORU SUZUKI



Suzuki and Sakuraba put their MMA backgrounds to the test with Minoru (standing) getting the better of this kayo/submission match.

This bout between two proven shootfighters could be won by submission or knockout only. Sakuraba violently attacked his opponent's arm, leaving Suzuki howling in pain. Sakuraba battered Suzuki with stiff blows and tried to break his arm, but Suzuki managed to hook a rear naked choke to steal the win.

WINNER: SUZUKI BY KNOCKOUT IN 9:21

NEVER OPENWEIGHT CHAMPION TOMOHIRO ISHII VS. TOGI MAKABE

Jim Ross deemed this one "a slobberknocker" as Ishii and Makabe exchanged stiff strong-style blows. After a brutal brawl, Makabe gained the upper hand with a hard lariat, then scaled the ropes and caught the champion with a diving knee to the back of the head to set up a title-changing pin.

WINNER: MAKABE BY PINFALL IN 12:23



Makabe connects with a lariat en route to beating Ishii for the NEVER Openweight championship.

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION RYUSUKE TAGUCHI VS. KENNY OMEGA



With the referee distracted by The Young Bucks, Omega paves his way to the IWGP junior heavyweight title by cold spraying champion Taguchi.

Omega used brawling tactics and interference from cornermen The Young Bucks to gain an advantage over the champion. Omega took charge with a German suplex out of an Electric Chair position and went on to win the bout and the belt.

**WINNER:
OMEGA BY
PINFALL IN
13:20**

IWGP TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS DOC GALLOWES & KARL ANDERSON VS. HIROOKI GOTO & KATSUYORI SHIBATA

**WINNERS: GOTO
AND SHIBATA BY
PINFALL IN 9:00**

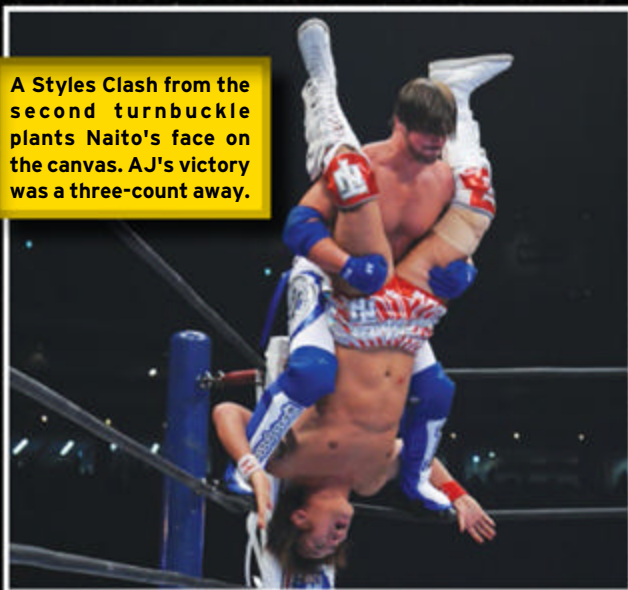
Anderson and Gallowes relied on a methodical, power-based attack to bully the challengers, but Goto and Shibata weathered the storm and kept fighting back. Even a desperate attempt at interference by “wBullet Babe” Amber O’Neal couldn’t help, as Goto and Shibata took all that the champs could dish out and came back to K.O. Gallowes and win the belts.

AJ STYLES VS. TETSUYA NAITO

Styles was determined to save some bragging rights for The Bullet Club faction, which had lost three of four matches on the card. After a back-and-forth struggle, Styles connected with a Bloody Sunday brainbuster. He attempted to follow with a Styles Clash, but Naito threw him through the ropes. AJ managed to return to the ring at the count of 19. The fight went up a turnbuckle, where Naito attempted huracanrana that AJ countered into a Styles Clash for the win.

**WINNER: AJ
STYLES BY PINFALL
IN 14:25**

A Styles Clash from the second turnbuckle plants Naito's face on the canvas. AJ's victory was a three-count away.



IWGP INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION SHINSUKE NAKAMURA VS. KOTA IBUSHI



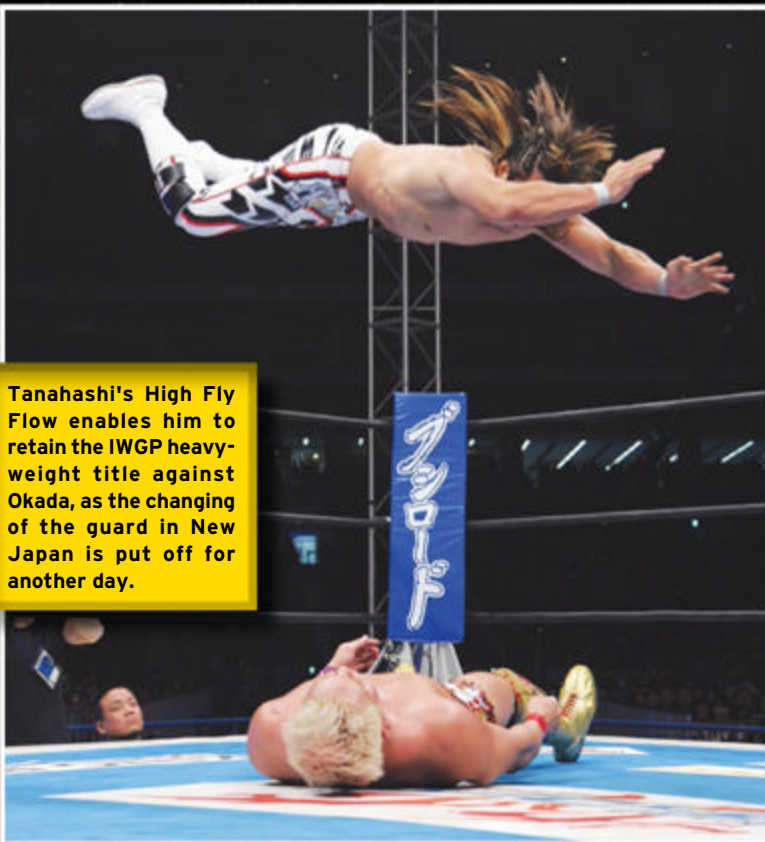
In what many observers rated the best match on an incredible card, IWGP Intercontinental champion Nakamura connects with a devastating Boma Ye against Ibushi.

Nakamura has a reputation for being a show-stealer, and that was certainly the case in this instant Match of the Year contender. Nakamura was full of his usual swagger, wearing a crown and cape to the ring as a sign of being “The King Of Strong Style.” But Ibushi wasn’t intimidated and took the fight to Nakamura, stunning the champion with an unbelievable dead-lift German suplex from the apron over the top rope that put Ross in classic JR mode. But, in the end, it was Nakamura who hit his vaunted Boma Ye kneestrike to seal the victory.

**WINNER: NAKAMURA
BY PINFALL IN
20:12**

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION HIROSHI TANAHASHI VS. KAZUCHIKA OKADA

The latest chapter in arguably the sport's hottest rivalry played out as the seven-time IWGP champ put his title on the line against his nemesis, Okada. This title match was filled with reversals, with Okada continuously going for his Rainmaker short-arm clothesline and Tanahashi attempting his High Fly Flow Splash. The catch-as-catch-can bout broke down into a brawl, and then a wild sequence of attempted finishers. Finally, Tanahashi landed a pair of High Fly Flows to earn the pinfall.



Tanahashi's High Fly Flow enables him to retain the IWGP heavyweight title against Okada, as the changing of the guard in New Japan is put off for another day.

**WINNER:
TANAHASHI BY
PINFALL IN
30:57**

(2015)

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED

REPORT CARDS FOR THE STARS

How Did Wrestling's Best Grade Out for 2014?

SECTION COMPILED BY DAN MURPHY

THERE ARE A few more months in the school year, but here in the *PWI* offices, the gradebooks have been closed and the final averages have been compiled. Put down your number-two pencils; it's time for the annual *PWI* Report Cards.

In the following pages, we evaluate 100 of the top names in wrestling today, including both male and female wrestlers from WWE, TNA, ROH, Japan, and the independent scene. We graded each wrestler based on his/her overall accomplishments during the 2014 calendar year. We listed each wrestler by grade, along with a brief synopsis of how they received that grade. Forget about promotional hype or fads; this breakdown makes it easy to see which wrestlers overachieved, which wrestlers underachieved, and which wrestlers are in danger of being "left behind."

Our scoring system is based on a curve, meaning we evaluate each wrestler on his (or her) individual progress and success relative to their own set of goals. For example, Seth Rollins earned an A+ this year, while John Cena earned an A-. Cena had more wins than Rollins and had a WWE championship

run, which Rollins did not. However, this was an average year by Cena's standards. It was a career year for Rollins, who broke apart from The Shield and established himself as the top villain in WWE.

Likewise, Damien Mizdow (B) scored better than The Miz (B-), even though Mizdow is presented as Miz' sidekick stunt double. During the evaluation period, Mizdow did a better job of advancing himself than Miz did, resulting in the slightly higher grade.

Wins and losses are the most important criteria in our analysis, but we also consider quality of opposition, versatility, career growth, and consistency.

This year, only two wrestlers earned perfect A+ scores: Rollins and AJ Styles.

Six acts (including one stable and one tag team) received grades of D or F. While there's really no way to sugar-coat those poor grades, it should be noted that we limited our Report Cards to only 100 subjects. The ones who didn't make the list—especially those that are affiliated with WWE or TNA—are the ones who seriously underperformed.

It's time to separate the teacher's pets from the class clowns. Here are *PWI*'s annual Report Cards.

Class dismissed.

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED

Report Cards

SETH ROLLINS

He may not be popular, but Rollins is certainly effective. After turning against his brothers in The Shield, Rollins ingratiated himself with The Authority and enjoyed all of the perks that came along with having friends in high places. Rollins has become The Authority's golden boy and the heir apparent to the WWE title. **GRADE: A+**

AJ STYLES

Leaving TNA was a risky career move, but it paid off. Styles found his competitive spark and became the leader of New Japan's Bullet Club, the hottest stable in wrestling. He won the IWGP title, beat ROH's top names, and re-established himself as one of the best pure talents in the world. **GRADE: A+**

BROCK LESNAR

The 2014 *PWI* Wrestler of the Year wrestled just four matches in 2014, but he made a monstrous impact, ending Undertaker's streak and capturing the WWE championship. Lesnar's dominance of John Cena at SummerSlam was unprecedented. His lack of activity was the only thing stopping him from earning a perfect score. **GRADE: A**

RUSEV

Rusev debuted as a surprise entrant in the 2014 Royal Rumble, but didn't attract much attention. One year later, he is the U.S. champion and he has yet to be pinned or submitted in WWE. Wins over Sheamus, Mark Henry, and The Big Show proved that this man is the real deal. **GRADE: A**

HIROSHI TANAHASHI

The hall-of-famer posted another sterling year, earning the IWGP title for a record seventh time with a win over AJ Styles in October. Though he ended the year with the belt, he spent most of 2014 chasing champs Kazuchika Okada and Styles and trading wins with Shinsuke Nakamura for the I-C title. **GRADE: A**

RANDY ORTON

Orton swaggered into 2014 as the unified WWE/World champion, but he dropped the title to Daniel Bryan at WrestleMania 30 and then slipped entirely out of the title picture. Losing feuds to John Cena, Roman Reigns, and Seth Rollins hurt his stock, and he ended the year with an injury, courtesy of a Rollins Curb Stomp. **GRADE: A**

THE USOS

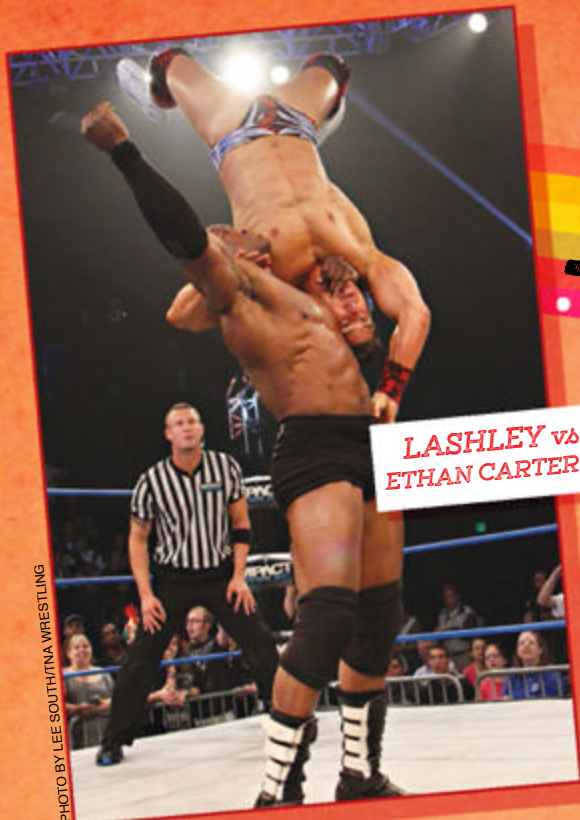
GRADE: A

Jimmy and Jey had a true breakout year, winning the WWE tag team title twice and being voted Tag Team of the Year by *PWI* readers. They teamed with John Cena in main-event bouts, earned a featured spot on *Total Divas*, and became one of the most popular acts in WWE.

THE USOS vs.
HEATH SLATER



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**LASHLEY vs.
ETHAN CARTER III**

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHWEST/NA WRESTLING

LASHLEY

GRADE: A-

After years of underachieving and flirting with MMA, Lashley finally committed to wrestling and captured his first World championship. At his best, Lashley is a beast with explosive power and superior wrestling skills. His mental toughness has been his Achilles heel. He took over TNA, but still played second fiddle to MVP.

THE WOLVES

The past year was a turbulent one for TNA, but despite all of the changes and instability, the team of Eddie Edwards and Davey Richards remained consistently excellent. Their series against Team 3-D and The Hardy Boyz established them as one of the finest tandems in the world. Injuries were an issue. **GRADE: A-**

ROMAN REIGNS

The WWE Universe may have bestowed its Superstar of the Year Slammy on big Roman, but we find that more than a little premature. Reigns looked great in the 2014 Royal Rumble and acquitted himself well in feuds against The Wyatts and Evolution, but he was hampered by injuries and didn't win any titles. **GRADE: A-**

SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

The Church of Nakamura just keeps adding disciples as more Americans discover the New Japan Intercontinental champion on PPV and YouTube. "The King Of Strong Style" exudes charisma and showmanship, but he is also a superb counter-wrestler and striker. A consistent show-stealer, he has eschewed the IWGP title for the secondary Intercontinental title. **GRADE: A-**

JOHN CENA

Cena won his 15th World title and main-evented six pay-per-views in 2014. That's an amazing year ... but by John Cena standards, it's nothing special. He suffered the worst loss of his career to Lesnar at SummerSlam, but bounced back to lead his team over The Authority's team at Survivor Series. **GRADE: A-**

BRAY WYATT

"The Eater Of Worlds" still talks a good game, but he hasn't quite been able to back up all of his backwoods boasting. He was one of the most enigmatic personalities in wrestling last year and had high-profile feuds against Bryan and Cena, but lost most of those matches. He recovered nicely with a series of wins over Dean Ambrose. **GRADE: A-**

DANIEL BRYAN

Daniel Bryan was the Cinderella story of the first half of the year ... then he became Sleeping Beauty. A career-threatening spinal injury forced him to vacate the WWE title. It will be difficult for him to recapture the unique groundswell of fan support and momentum that propelled him to the top of WWE in 2014. **GRADE: A-**

AJ LEE

The three-time *PWI* Woman of the Year had the Divas title under lock and key until she dropped it to Paige in an upset on *Raw*. Lee and Paige pushed each other, resulting in one of the best women's rivalries WWE has seen in years. AJ missed several weeks due to various injuries. **GRADE: A-**

JESSICKA HAVOK

It was fitting that the first episode of *Impact Wrestling* on Destination America featured a faceoff between Jessicka Havok and Awesome Kong. Havok has been the most buzz-worthy and physically imposing Knockout since Kong carried the division in 2008. Havok won the title shortly after her debut. **GRADE: A-**

KEVIN OWENS

We were tempted to give the former Kevin Steen an Incomplete because he is so new to NXT, but he deserves credit for everything he has done to get to this stage of his career. The former ROH champion made his swan song on the indies and promises to be one of the most unique talents ever to come through developmental. **GRADE: B+**

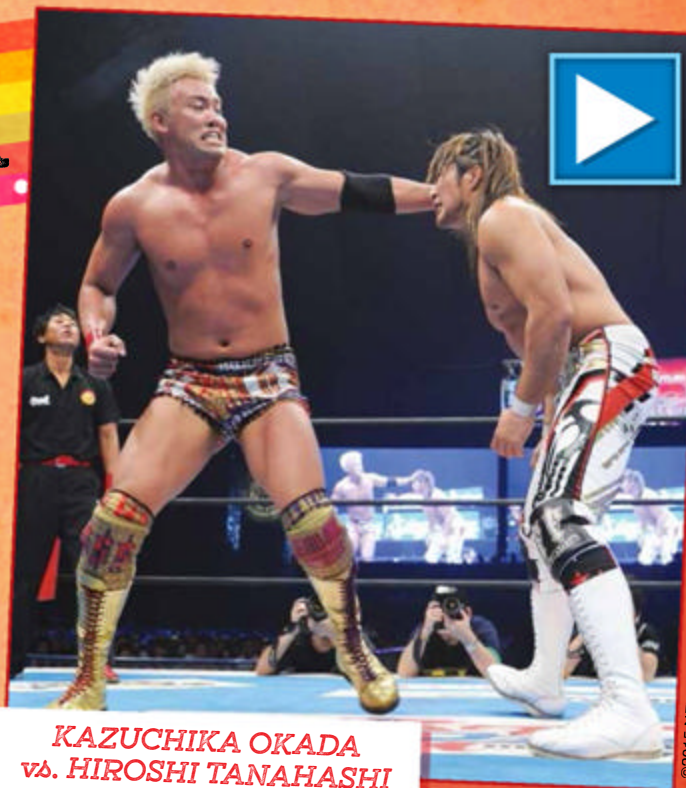
FINN BÁLOR

Some know the former Prince Devitt for his ornate body paint and unique entrances. Some know him for his remarkably fluid wrestling style and his devastating Bloody Sunday DDT. The former Bullet Club leader has made his way to NXT and is one of the most highly touted prospects to come through the system since Daniel Bryan. **GRADE: B+**

KAZUCHIKA OKADA

GRADE: A-

"The Rainmaker" lost the IWGP title to AJ Styles and was unable to best Styles in a series of rematches. He did bounce back by winning the 2014 G1 Climax Tournament, guaranteeing another title shot. Okada cashed in that shot and lost to Tanahashi (see story on page 40).



KAZUCHIKA OKADA
vs. HIROSHI TANAHASHI

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THE AUTHORITY

The past year certainly didn't go as planned for The Authority, but they managed to survive and to right the ship. Daniel Bryan crashed their planned WrestleMania main event, beating Triple-H to do so. Stephanie McMahon got embroiled in a feud with Brie Bella. And, at Survivor Series, they lost their executive power ... temporarily. You can't keep The Authority down. **GRADE: A-**

HIDEO ITAMI

Formerly known as KENTA, the 14-year veteran is a former Pro Wrestling NOAH GHC champion and the innovator of the Go To Sleep finisher. Another hot prospect in NXT, the "Hero Of Pain" has already secured wins over Justin Gabriel and The Ascension. His striking ability and strong style experience will help him stand out in NXT and beyond. **GRADE: B+**

LUKE HARPER

The wild-eyed brawler went toe-to-toe with John Cena, The Shield, Evolution, and Dolph Ziggler. He maintained his crazed intensity all year, even after being “freed” by Bray Wyatt. Harper won the I-C title and it wouldn’t be a stretch to imagine him contending for the WWE belt in 2015. **GRADE: B+**

SAMI ZAYN

Zayn’s yearlong quest for the NXT championship came to a conclusion at NXT Takeover: Revolution when he put his NXT career on the line against Adrian Neville’s title. Zayn has been the epitome of dedication and dogged determination since signing a developmental deal and it paid off as he finally won that championship. **GRADE: B+**

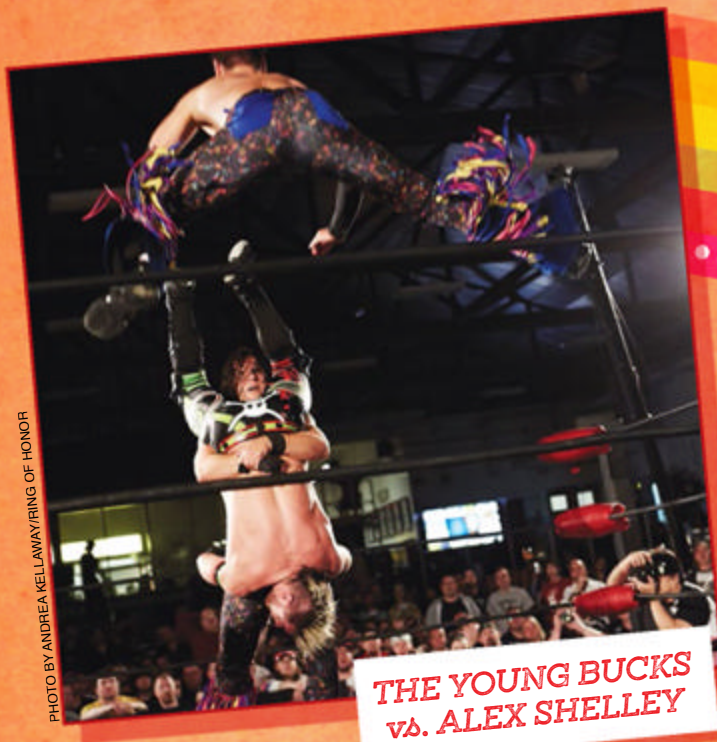


PHOTO BY ANDREA KELLAWAY/RING OF HONOR

**THE YOUNG BUCKS
vs. ALEX SHELLEY**

the YOUNG BUCKS

GRADE: B+

Matt and Nick Jackson are arguably the most innovative tag team in the sport today. They had a seven-month run as IWGP tag team champions, bringing their brand of precision teamwork, cocksure swagger, and cornucopia of superkicks to Japan. Their arrogance has cost them matches, but it has also won them a dedicated following.

PAIGE

The second-generation sweetheart was named number-one in the 2014 “PWI Female 50.” She captured the Divas title twice, and held the NXT Women’s title until she voluntarily surrendered it after winning the Divas title from AJ Lee in her *Raw* debut. The Brit joined the cast of *Total Divas* at year’s end. **GRADE: B+**

DOLPH ZIGGLER

Ziggler likes to call himself “The Show-Off.” Showing off is fine, but showing off for the wrong reasons can be foolish (just ask NFL players Lamarr Houston and Stephen Tulloch). Ziggler often forgets that the purpose of wrestling is winning titles, not hot-dogging. In 2014,, he got his priorities in order, capturing the I-C belt and winning the Survivor Series for Team Cena. **GRADE: B+**

ADRIAN NEVILLE

For years, Neville has built a reputation as being one of the best high-flyers in the game. In 2014, he put his aerial prowess on display in NXT and lived up to his old nickname “The Man Gravity Forgot.” After a 10-month run as NXT champ, he’s ready for the main WWE stage. **GRADE: B+**

ALBERTO EL PATRON

The former Alberto Del Rio was treading water in WWE when he was handed his walking papers by the company. That termination lit a fire under the four-time World champion. In December, he ended the two-year AAA heavyweight title reign of El Texano Jr., becoming the first man to hold both the AAA and CMLL titles. He also branched into ROH. **GRADE: B+**

ADAM COLE

During his 275-day reign as ROH champion, Cole successfully defended the title against contenders like Jay Briscoe, Jushin Liger, Kevin Steen, and Jay Lethal. He lost the title to Michael Elgin, but rebounded to win the Survival of the Fittest Tournament in November. Unfortunately, his year was bookended by serious injuries (a concussion and a torn labrum). **GRADE: B+**

TARYN TERRELL

Terrell took time off from wrestling and had a baby. Remarkably, she came back in impeccable physical condition. Within weeks of her return, she became the top contender to the Knockouts title and went on to win the belt in a three-way with Gail Kim and Jessicka Havok. She was active less than six months. **GRADE: B+**

BOBBY ROODE

You know things have gone topsy-turvy when "The It Factor" becomes the voice of conscience and reason, but that's exactly what happened in TNA this year. Roode got back in the fans' good graces when he clashed with MVP and he won his second TNA World title in October. **GRADE: B+**

REDRAGON

Kyle O'Reilly and Bobby Fish extended their winning ways from Ring of Honor to New Japan, capturing the IWGP junior heavyweight tag title. The three-time ROH tag champs have scored wins over The Addiction, The Young Bucks, and The Briscoes. The only thing they need is competition. **GRADE: B+**

JAY BRISCOE

Sandy Fork, Delaware's favorite son lost his bid to be recognized as the "real" ROH champion, failing against champion Adam Cole at Supercard of Honor VIII (Briscoe had been forced to relinquish the title yet still claimed ownership), but five months later, he won the ROH belt for the second time. Not bad for someone who's been labeled a tag specialist. **GRADE: B+**

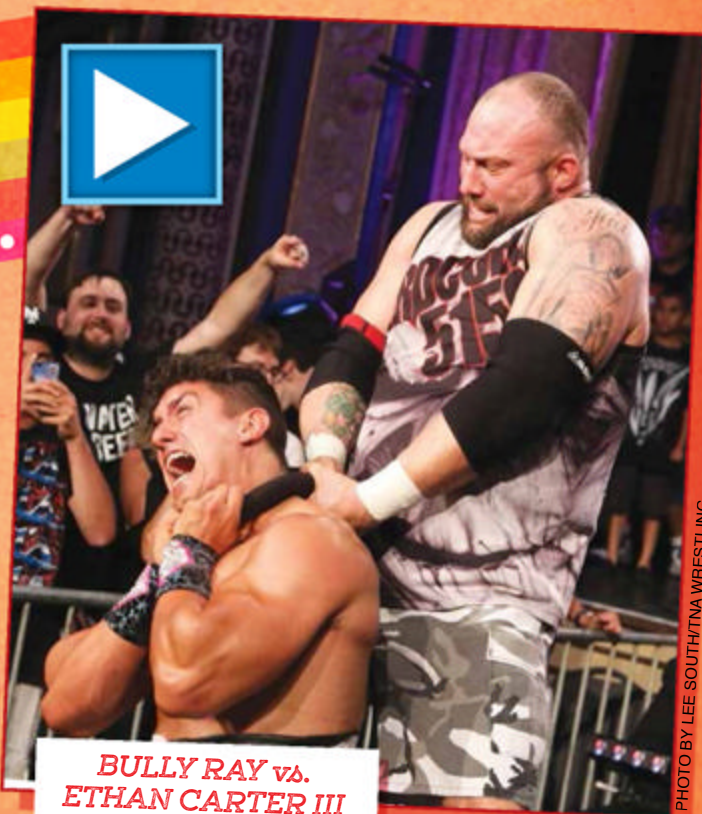
MVP

Power tends to corrupt in TNA, and MVP was another victim. After joining the company as an investor, MVP suddenly turned on then-champion Eric Young and named himself top contender. An injury ruined his plans, however, and his hired gun, Lashley, leapfrogged him in title contention. He made a big impact, but he didn't make many friends. **GRADE: B+**

BULLY RAY

GRADE: B+

After a sterling 2013, Bully Ray was bound for a comedown in 2014. Rather than chasing titles, Bully spent most of the year chasing Dixie Carter, eventually fulfilling his promise of putting her through a table. He also re-formed Team 3-D to mixed results. He is no longer under contract to TNA.



**BULLY RAY vs.
ETHAN CARTER III**

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING



PHOTO BY STU SAKS

NIKKI BELLA
vs. AKSANA

NIKKI BELLA

GRADE: **B**

Nikki proved to be more effective as a rulebreaker than a fan favorite. By cozying up to The Authority and instigating a feud with her own sister, Nikki proved she is willing to do anything she needs to do to get to the top. She also added a terrific new finisher with The Rack Attack, which helped her capture—and retain—the Divas title.

ERIC YOUNG

Whether he was “marrying” ODB, teaming with a blow-up doll, or fighting against evil as “Super Eric,” EY has been a comedic figure for years. In 2014, he got serious. He became the people’s champion and went on to become the TNA World champion. His reign was brief but inspirational. **GRADE: B+**

ROB CONWAY

Conway reclaimed the NWA heavyweight title for the U.S. with a win over Satoshi Kojima in June. Since then, he has been tirelessly touring NWA promotions (and competing in New Japan) to defend that title in hopes of restoring some of its prior glory. Was shelved in early 2015 after having his appendix removed. **GRADE: B+**

JOE DOERING

The Chicago native became the sixth non-Japanese wrestler to win the prestigious All Japan Pro Wrestling Triple Crown title, following in the footsteps of Stan Hansen, Terry Gordy, and Steve Williams. He defended the title in the U.S. with a win over Rhino before dropping it to Go Shiozaki in January. **GRADE: B+**

ACH

A terrific aerialist, ACH steadily worked his way up the ROH pecking order and earned a title shot against Jay Briscoe in November. He came up short in that match, but he acquitted himself well. Promises to be a major contender for the TV and tag titles this year. **GRADE: B**

DAMIEN MIZDOW

It’s time for the understudy to become the feature player. The former Damien Sandow may not be the “Intellectual Savior To The Masses” anymore, but he’s been the most entertaining stunt man since Lee Majors starred in *The Fall Guy*. His pratfalls and mimicry are silly, but the fans eat it up, and that gets him TV time. **GRADE: B**

SHEAMUS

The Irishman’s career trajectory has been irrevocably skewed. Sheamus won his first World title less than six months after his WWE debut. Now, five years later, he is far removed from the World title picture and is contending for secondary titles. For some, the U.S. title would be a career highlight. For a three-time World champion, it’s a letdown. **GRADE: B**

MARK BRISCOE
vs. JIMMY JACOBS

PHOTO BY STU SAKS

GRADE:
B

MARK BRISCOE

Some wrestlers might feel resentful if their partner (and brother) went on to a major singles championship, leaving the team in limbo. Not Mark Briscoe. He is fully supportive of Jay's singles career and teams with him when the opportunity presents itself. Mark remains one of ROH's most entertaining competitors.

CHARLOTTE

The 2014 *PWI* Rookie of the Year won a tournament to capture the vacant NXT Women's championship and has won over critics and fans alike for her work in the developmental system. A natural athlete with impeccable bloodlines, Charlotte is positioned for superstardom in WWE, though she suffered a setback loss to Natalya in her *Raw* debut.

GRADE: B

GUNNER

Gunner is a physical force, but he is a lousy judge of character. He formed alliances with Bobby Roode and Samuel Shaw and got burned both times. Maybe he lacks self-confidence. A manager might be a smart move. He allows himself to get roped into nowhere feuds. Even if he wins those feuds, they do nothing for him. GRADE: B

AUSTIN ARIES

Aries has done it all in TNA—six X division titles, a World title, and a tag title with Bobby Roode. He has a loud fan base, an explosive moveset, and all the confidence in the world. So ... why isn't he doing more? The X division is great, but Aries needs to get out of his comfort zone. He can achieve so much more. GRADE: B

CEDRIC ALEXANDER

One of the young lions of ROH, Alexander earned shots at the ROH heavyweight and TV titles and scored some high-profile wins. At age 25, his star is still on the rise. This will be the year when we find out if he can go from a contender to a champion.

GRADE: B

JAY LETHAL

Lethal is an exciting wrestler with charisma and good promo skills. He holds the ROH TV title and is one of the most respected men in the ROH locker room. But he's also a 13-year veteran with a win over Kurt Angle on his resume. His once-promising career has grown stagnant. GRADE: B

GAIL KIM

Mrs. Robert Irvine became a four-time Knockouts champion in 2014. She also reasserted herself as the gold standard of the Knockouts division. In an era where wins and losses can become meaningless, a win over Kim is still a major accomplishment. Her title run was short, but her efforts year-long were superb. GRADE: B

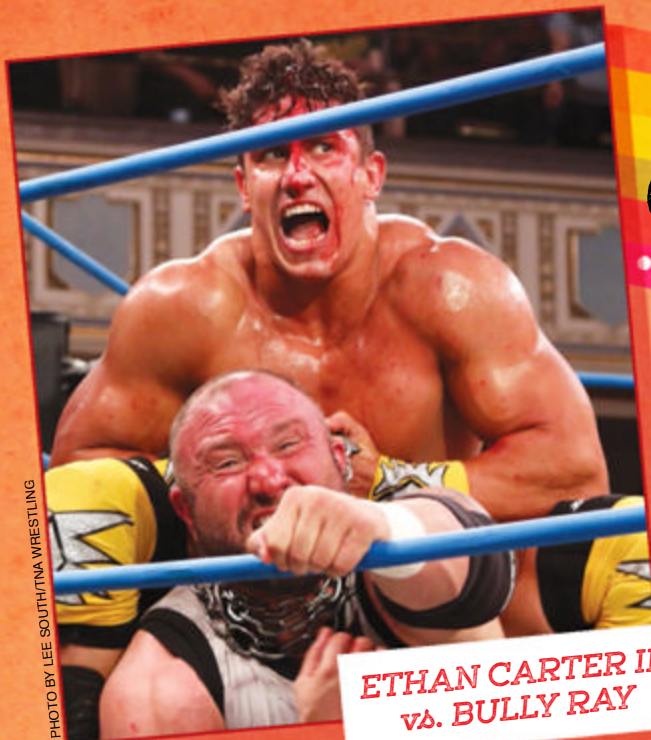


PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

**ETHAN CARTER III
v.s. BULLY RAY**

ETHAN CARTER III

GRADE: B-

ECIII became collateral damage of Dixie Carter's war against Bully Ray. Carter had been on a path toward the TNA World title, but he broke off to circle the wagons around his aunt and Team Dixie, inadvertently sacrificing his title ambitions for the cause. He learned that being a Carter can be both a blessing and a curse.

DEAN AMBROSE

For a couple of months in the fall, Ambrose was WWE's most dangerous—and popular—competitor. His "lunatic fringe" persona harkened back to the heyday of "Stone Cold" Steve Austin. But Ambrose lost his edge when he became bogged down in a losing feud with Bray Wyatt. He needs to regroup to get his lunatic back. **GRADE: B-**

BRIE BELLA

Last year, Brie got married, maintained a starring role in *Total Divas*, and wrestled the highest-profile singles match of her career, against Stephanie McMahon at SummerSlam. Despite those highs, she also had major periods of inactivity, including the time she "quit" WWE and the 30 days she was forced to be Nikki's assistant. **GRADE: B-**

BAD NEWS BARRETT

Barrett has been dogged by injuries and ill-fitting gimmicks for the past few years, but it finally seems like he's hitting his stride. Barrett's strength is being himself—a bare-knuckle fighter and legitimate tough guy. He won his fifth I-C title in December after missing five months with an injury. **GRADE: B-**

THE MIZ

The Miz' acting career may not have taken off quite as he planned, but his stunt double has helped him get out of his slump. Unfortunately for Miz, the stunt double has been eclipsing the so-called star. It gets increasingly hard to believe that Miz actually headlined a WrestleMania not too long ago. **GRADE: B-**

RYBACK

The man with the limitless appetite had an uneven year. He had a disappointing tag team run with Curtis Axel and was shelved after undergoing hernia surgery. He was just getting back into being the monster he was in 2013 when he was "fired" by The Authority. Every step forward seems to be followed by two steps back. **GRADE: B-**

TOMMASO CIAMPA

"The Sicilian Psychopath" is a former ROH TV champion, but his hot temper, volatile personality, and unfettered aggression have cost him several DQ losses, curtailing his title hopes. A perennially underrated competitor, Ciampa has the tools to get to the next level, but he hasn't been able to make that next step. **GRADE: B-**

LOW-KI

After a brief retirement, Low-Ki returned to action for TNA and Dragon Gate USA. He suffered losses to Samoa Joe, but went on to win the X division title twice, making him a four-time champion. Now he has cast his lot with MVP's new Beat Down Clan. Will he be a goon or a player? **GRADE: B-**

THE ADDICTION

Christopher Daniels and Frankie Kazarian followed AJ Styles out of TNA and found a new home in Ring of Honor. They have established themselves as marquee players for the company, but the dream matches have yet to occur. The new scenery presented new opportunities that have yet to be realized. **GRADE: B-**

MR. ANDERSON

Anderson was bogged down in meaningless feuds with Samuel Shaw and James Storm for much of the year. He is still a popular competitor and a proven main-eventer, but he was a bit player for much of the year. Coming to the aid of Chris Melendez was commendable and could put him in the right direction for 2015. **GRADE: C+**

ERICK ROWAN

The man behind the sheep mask was the silent enforcer of The Wyatt Family before he was emancipated by Bray Wyatt. Surprisingly, without Wyatt's influence, Rowan settled into a role as a fan favorite. Formidable in the ring, he is ill-equipped to handle the politics of WWE on his own, running afoul of The Authority. **GRADE: C+**

GOLDUST & STARDUST

The Brothers Rhodes started the year as tag champions but fell into a losing streak, until Cody discovered his inner weirdo. Cody's Stardust persona revitalized the team and helped them regain the tag belts, but they were slumping again as the year ended. As entertaining as they are, they would be more successful if they dialed back the bizarre antics. **GRADE: C+**

NATALYA

Some analysts consider Natalya to be the most talented female wrestler on the WWE roster, but her record is checkered with losses to inferior opponents. Maybe *Total Divas* is too much of a distraction; it certainly seems to be taking its toll on her marriage to Tyson Kidd. **GRADE: C+**

**GRADE:
C+**

Elgin finally got the monkey off his back and won the ROH title he had been chasing for the past three years, but his title run lasted just two months and then he had a falling-out with the company. His new anti-establishment approach is a crutch for a guy who never needed excuses before.

**MICHAEL ELGIN
vs. JAY BRISCOE**



PHOTO BY ANDREA KELLAWAY/RING OF HONOR

**MICHAEL
ELGIN**

ROCKSTAR SPUD

The first British Boot Camp winner spent most of the year serving as Dixie Carter's underappreciated toady. He was entertaining in that role and it earned him a fair amount of TV time, but it did little to establish him as a credible wrestler. He could be a major player in the X division this year. **GRADE: C+**

THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

Angelina Love returned to TNA in March and she wasted little time in "getting the band back together," recruiting Velvet Sky and reforming The Beautiful People. It worked well for Love, who won the Knockouts title for a sixth time, but it knocked Sky out of title contention. **GRADE: C+**

MIKE BENNETT

Bennett married the stunning Maria Kanellis, which has to rank as one of his greatest accomplishments of the year. He also impressed New Japan officials and was booked in matches against Hiroshi Tanahashi and Jushin Liger. This is the year for him to finally make a run at the ROH belt. **GRADE: C+**

MADISON RAYNE

"The Queen Bee" was haunted by ghosts from her past, as her old Beautiful People partners cost her the Knockouts title and spoiled her TNA return. The five-time Knockouts champion was unnerved by Brittany, frustrated by TBP, and overshadowed by Jessicka Havok, and she lashed out at Taryn Terrell at year's end. **GRADE: C+**

THE BIG SHOW

The only thing consistent about The Big Show is his inconsistency. Show was a World title contender at the start of the year. He was humbled by an embarrassing loss to Lesnar, formed an underwhelming team with Mark Henry, and eventually turned on Cena to become a member of The Authority. He was an ineffective pawn for most of the year. **GRADE: C**

JAMES STORM

The Cowboy is channeling the spirit of Kevin Sullivan, gathering all the damaged souls he can find and taking them under his wing. Storm was overdue for a change of pace—his beer-swilling redneck persona had worn out its welcome. A tag team title with Abyss is a good change of pace. **GRADE: C**

NAOMI vs.
NIKKI BELLA



GRADE:
C

The former Funkadactyl married Jimmy Uso and split with Cameron. She had an impressive showing at Survivor Series, where she eliminated both Cameron and Paige. An agile and speedy competitor, she still needs a bit more polish to contend for the Divas title. Jimmy could offer a few pointers.

NAOMI

SAMOA JOE

Joe looked like he was finally going to regain the TNA World title when he faced Magnus for the belt at Lockdown, but he was screwed by Abyss' interference. He then slipped out of World title contention and settled for winning the X division title. Joe always seems to be moving in reverse. Turning on the fans and joining the BDC is another misstep. **GRADE: C**

ABYSS

Let's see if we can get this straight: Joseph Park was a good guy. Then, as Abyss, he turned heel when he attacked Joe at Lockdown. Then Abyss was a good guy when he feuded with Bram. Then he was a bad guy when he joined The Revolution. His lack of direction is mind-boggling. At least he won the tag title. **GRADE: C**

JEFF HARDY

Hardy's bizarre masked persona of Willow flopped so badly that Kurt Angle literally had to come out and beg him to kill off the character. We don't understand what motivates Hardy these days. He still gets high-profile bouts and can still compete, but where's the passion? **GRADE: C**

RODERICK STRONG

A C grade isn't great, but Strong should take solace in the fact that he was able to wrestle at all, after suffering a serious neck injury, courtesy of an AJ Styles' Styles Clash. Fortunately, Strong was able to return to the ring. He made it to the finals of the PWG Battle of Los Angeles and beat Adam Page at Final Battle. **GRADE: C**

SANADA

GRADE: C

The Japanese sensation fell victim to James Storm's poisonous rhetoric. Sanada held the X division title and established himself as one of the most dynamic and intense wrestlers in TNA before he met Storm. The Cowboy created a rift between Sanada and his mentor, The Great Muta, and the once-promising star became Storm's stooge. More than losing the X title, he lost his honor.



**SANADA vs.
AUSTIN ARIES**

THE BRO-MANS

They may have been a bit of a joke at the beginning, but you have to hand it to them—Jessie Godderz and Robbie E are two-time tag champions. The team took a sabbatical when Robbie E (with Brooke Adams) competed on *The Amazing Race*. Two title reigns and mainstream TV appearances balance out a mediocre year in-ring. **GRADE: C**

CAMERON

The narcissistic former Funkadactyl seems like she's much more interested in being a reality TV starlet than contending for the Divas title. After splitting with Naomi, she began carrying a mirror to the ring with her. Her constant preening for the cameras has cost her several matches. She desperately needs focus. **GRADE: C-**

SAMUEL SHAW

TNA's resident American psycho had some shining moments in his feud with Mr. Anderson, but his infatuation with Christy Hemme overshadowed everything he did in the ring. Other than his choke finisher, his wrestling still is methodical and slow-paced. He's overly cautious and somewhat bland, until he's provoked. A manager—or a good therapist—would help. **GRADE: C-**



CRAZZY STEVE

Steve was the standout member of The Menagerie, but that really isn't saying much, as Mike Knox and Rebel barely competed. The Crazy One was unorthodox and scored some impressive wins, but he rarely got a chance to shine on his own. He's a far better pure wrestler than he lets on. **GRADE: C-**

TYSON KIDD

GRADE: C-

Long considered one of the most underrated wrestlers in WWE, Kidd finally earned some more TV time, thanks largely to *Total Divas*. However, is it really worth putting his marriage with Natalya in jeopardy just to get noticed in WWE? Kidd is walking a very dangerous line.

ADAM ROSE

You know things are bad when you're being upstaged by a giant bunny rabbit. Adam Rose's Exotic Express was fun for a while, but it quickly ran out of steam. The most interesting part of Rose's routine now is looking to see what indy stars are moonlighting as Rosebuds. **GRADE: C-**

CESARO

Cesaro started the year strongly, but he went off the tracks. After winning the Andre the Giant Memorial Battle Royal at 'Mania, he seemed ready for World title contention. Instead, he fell into a terrible losing streak. His new team with Tyson Kidd seems like a desperation move by a man trying to remain relevant. **GRADE: C-**

JACK SWAGGER

"The All-American American" turned down the xenophobic rants and actually showed himself to be a true patriot by standing up for the U.S. and challenging Rusev (albeit unsuccessfully). He came out on the losing end of feuds against Adam Rose and Cesaro, too. Zeb Colter may want to recruit a new tag team partner for his charge. **GRADE: C-**

ALICIA FOX

Fox's temper tantrums and unorthodox behavior actually earned her a Divas title shot, but she was unable to beat Paige at Payback. The rest of the year was mostly unremarkable tag matches with Aksana and multiple-Diva matches where she did little to stand out. A feud with Nikki Bella could be in the cards. **GRADE: C-**

BRAM

The Englishman seems to be on a mission to bring back hardcore wrestling. He entered TNA without any fanfare, simply being billed as Magnus' childhood pal. An aggressive wrestler, he never connected with fans. Hitting people over the head with chairs (or getting hit) won't help that. **GRADE: C-**

TIGRE UNO

The former AAA star was a welcome addition to the TNA roster. He had memorable bouts against Manik and Sanada, and became one of the focal points in a resurgent X division. But when Samoa Joe and Low-Ki arrived on the scene, Uno became the odd man out. An amazing talent that has been underutilized. **GRADE: C-**

KANE

Corporate Kane was a paid enforcer. Wins and losses were insignificant; The Authority paid him to dish out pain and punishment to its enemies. Kane wasn't the dominant force we have seen in the past, but he was hardly a pushover. He just had his own agenda, which didn't involve title belts. **GRADE: C-**

MAGNUS

We'll never know what could have been. Magnus had momentum and fan support, but instead of winning the TNA World title as a fan favorite, he took shortcuts to the top. The result was a forgettable title run, and a subsequent fall out of the title scene. This should have been the year Magnus became the face of TNA. It didn't happen. **GRADE: C-**

MARK HENRY

Another disappointing year from "The World's Strongest Man." He bit off more than he could chew when he challenged Lesnar. He suffered some injuries, which is an ongoing occurrence with the big man. Then he inexplicably turned on The Big Show. We're still waiting for him to re-open his "Hall Of Pain." **GRADE: C-**

RD EVANS

With The Undertaker's streak ended, Evans' winning streak became the hottest topic in wrestling. Okay ... maybe not. Evans milked his "New Streak"—padded by wins over lesser competition (including non-wrestlers) and marred by outside interference—all the way to a TV title shot, which he lost. **GRADE: C-**

MATT HARDY

Hardy split his time between ROH and TNA, competing mostly in tag matches (with Mike Bennett in ROH and brother Jeff in TNA). Matt thrives in tag matches, and has looked particularly good since reuniting with Jeff. Matt put in his time in the indies and seems re-focused on establishing himself on the national stage. **GRADE: C-**

FANDANGO

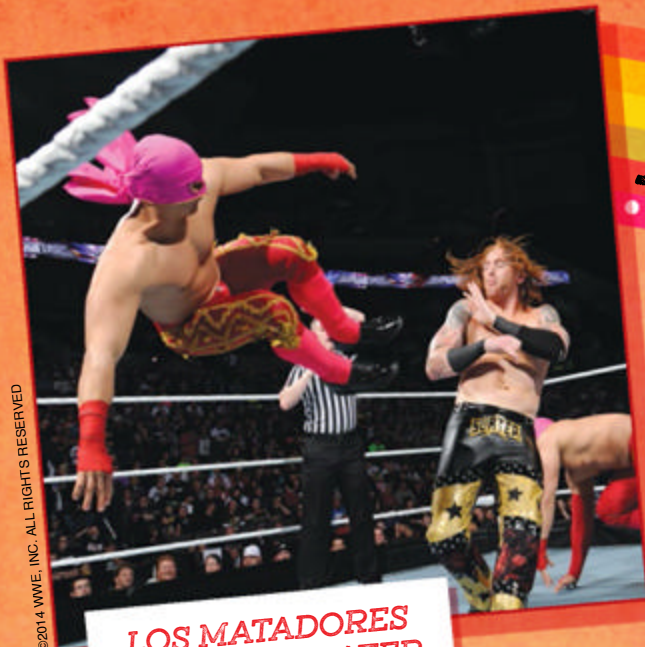
GRADE: D

Here's a great "What If" exercise? What if Fandango didn't suffer a concussion last summer? He had been poised to win the I-C title; "Fandango-ing" was a crowd sensation. If not for the injury, he might be a main-event player today. Instead, his WWE career has been a series of starts, stops, and silly dance-offs with an unending string of partners.



FANDANGO
vs. THE MIZ

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



**LOS MATADORES
vs. HEATH SLATER**

LOS MATADORES

GRADE: F

Primo and Epico—or, should we say Diego and Fernando—had no success at all in 2014, but they did score some wins over Goldust and Stardust in early-2015, which bodes well for next year's report card.

BO DALLAS

Dallas got off to an un-Bo-lievable start, racking up wins over R-Truth, Damien Sandow, and The Great Khali shortly after his debut, but the second-generation star couldn't maintain his Bo-momentum (okay, we'll stop with the puns). Former NXT champion has suffered some damaging losses and needs to show some killer instinct. **GRADE: D**

HEATH SLATER

The former One Man Band leader has been teaming with Titus O'Neal as Slater Gator, but wins have been few and far between. Slater has a small cult following, and he has managed to keep his spot in WWE despite several rounds of cutbacks, but he's not doing anything to lift himself out of his current position on the card. **GRADE: D**

THE NEW DAY

Kofi Kingston, Big E, and Xavier Woods were better off on their own than with this ill-conceived new faction. The New Day is like the time Dolph Ziggler was used as a male cheerleader, or when Batista was used as Devon's personal "deacon." It's a grouping that undercuts each man's talents. It's a day that has to end. **GRADE: D**

R-TRUTH

Believe it or not, there was a time in the not-so-distant past that R-Truth was a viable World title contender. He certainly isn't anymore. The former U.S. and WWE tag champion is wrestling dark matches against Fandango and Adam Rose. His highlight of the year was a win over Bo Dallas. **GRADE: F**

THE ASCENSION

The highly touted former NXT champions looked impressive in a win over Mizdow in their *Raw* debut, but drew some backlash the following week when they claimed they were better than Demolition and The Road Warriors. They haven't earned those bragging rights yet. **GRADE: INCOMPLETE**

STING

The 13-time World champion set foot inside a WWE ring for the first time at Survivor Series. Then he disappeared ... presumably back to the rafters. We need to see more than one surprise run-in to gauge his achievements. **GRADE: INCOMPLETE**

THE UNDERTAKER

The Streak is over. What else would motivate The Dead Man to continue? It remains to be seen if he can recover. **GRADE: INCOMPLETE**

the **BUSINESS PAGE**

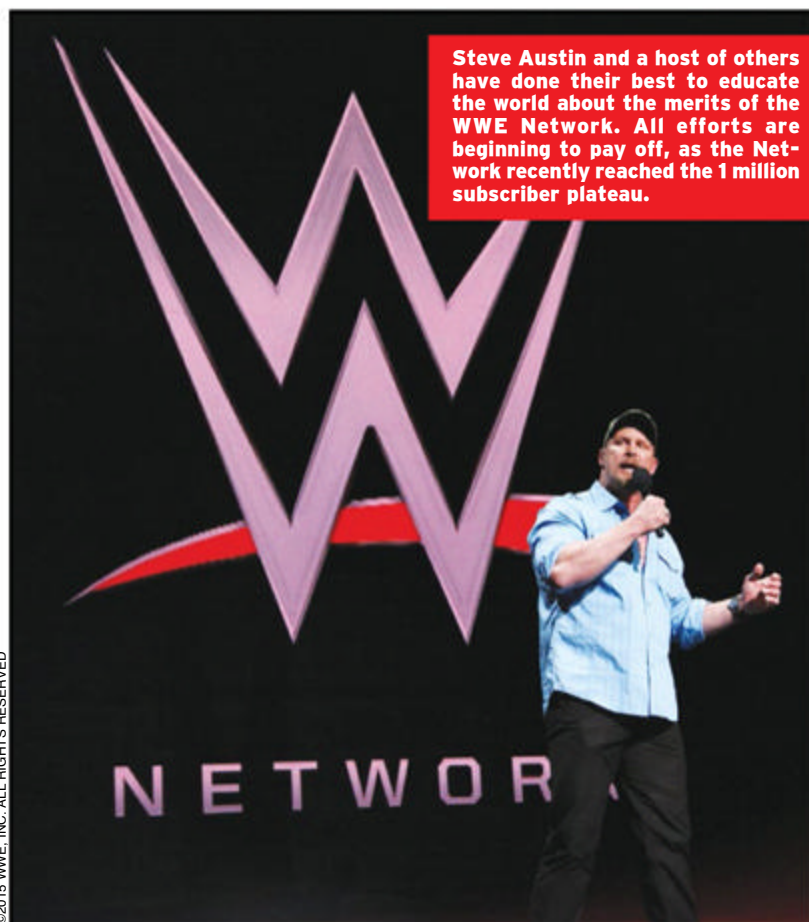
by HARRY BURKETT

WWE Network at one million ... About 10 months ago, as the WWE Network reached the 667,000-subscriber mark, Jayme Wiggins of Intrepid Capital told *Forbes* the following: “The Network is a slam-dunk for a diehard fan, but I don’t think it’s going to be easy for them to get another 500,000.”

It wasn’t easy. But Vince Mc-

Mahon, Stephanie McMahon, and Triple-H continued to spearhead the “\$9.99 movement” and repeatedly prime the pump with free trial offers until fans were chanting the WWE Network’s monthly fee in arenas around the world. The Network finally reached one million subscribers in late-January, a sign that WWE was gaining momentum as it headed into WrestleMania season.

Steve Austin and a host of others have done their best to educate the world about the merits of the WWE Network. All efforts are beginning to pay off, as the Network recently reached the 1 million subscriber plateau.



The number of subscribers should increase dramatically as we approach WrestleMania 31. Remember, every WrestleMania since WM27 has achieved one million pay-per-view buys, either as a stand-alone purchase or in combination with the WWE Network. The numbers should keep growing as many fans opt for the \$9.99 Network monthly option, compared to at least \$59.95 for a one-time WrestleMania.

Warning: Everyone should brace for the inevitable fallout. Now that WWE doesn’t stipulate a six-month commitment for the Network, expect thousands of subscribers to fall off in the weeks after March 29. Some people will subscribe to the Network just to watch the big event and will cancel soon after.

The Wall Street analysts will blame WWE’s business model. The Internet pundits will blame Vince for putting Roman Reigns in the main event.

Rest assured, those fans will return.

The WWE Network is not like Netflix and other subscriber-based services. Consumers don’t have brand loyalty to Netflix; it’s merely a new medium to watch movies. So, in reference to all the WWE fans who said they would be canceling their WWE Network subscriptions because Reigns won The Royal Rumble, we can expect those same individuals to pay another \$9.99 to see Reigns get his butt kicked.

Consider also that WWE’s calendar is becoming increasingly seasonal in nature. The Royal Rumble, which is designed to determine who will challenge for the WWE World title at WrestleMania, is akin to WWE’s playoffs, while WrestleMania is the Super Bowl. For the past several years, more than 50 percent of WWE’s pay-per-view revenue has been generated

during the first quarter, between the Rumble and WrestleMania.

Expect a similar ebb and flow regarding WWE Network subscriptions. Just because a fan cancels a subscription doesn't mean he or she won't return when the time is right. Meanwhile, WWE will be adding subscribers as the quality of its programming improves.

The Great Khali to TNA? ...

Ring Ka King might have been a bust, but don't underestimate the value of TNA's exposure in India. While *Impact Wrestling* is tucked away on Destination America on U.S. cable, its home base in India—Sony Six—was the most viewed sports television channel in that country during 2014.

If infrastructure allows, TNA could be poised for a profitable



Mark Burnett and Robert Rodriguez have seen their Lucha Underground project grow, as more cable and satellite providers are picking up the El Rey Network.

PHOTO COURTESY OF EL REY NETWORK

tour of the subcontinent in the near future. TNA already has strong television deals around the globe, and its popularity

in the U.K., Ireland, and sub-Saharan Africa is on par with that of WWE.

But, Dixie, if you're thinking about calling Khali, please think again.

WWE STOCKWATCH

[FOR THE PERIOD OF DECEMBER 1, 2014 TO JANUARY 31, 2015]

60-DAY HIGH: 12.86 on January 27

60-DAY LOW: 9.82 on January 20

52-WEEK HIGH: 31.98 on March 13, 2014

52-WEEK LOW: 9.82 January 20, 2015

After dropping to a year-low of 9.82 on January 20, WWE stock rebounded to 12.86 on January 27, when it was announced the WWE Network had reached a milestone of one million subscribers. With television ratings increasing slightly and plenty of WrestleMania hype, this should be a good season for WWE stock.

Still, WWE stock has lost 60 percent of its value since this time last year, and financial analyst Zacks has downgraded WWE stock from "outperform" to "neutral," which, basically, means "don't buy."

Three points in WWE's defense: One, it's widely acknowledged the entire stock market—including WWE's stock price—was over-inflated last year. Two, the WWE Network is a one-of-a-kind venture that's not easy to quantify by traditional metrics. Three, the Network is very close to its breakeven point in terms of profitability.

Chairman and CEO Vince McMahon has promoted 19-year WWE veteran Lisa Fox Lee, senior vice president of network programming, to the newly created position of executive vice president of content. Lee will oversee WWE's Creative team, reporting directly to McMahon and Triple-H.

Mucha Lucha Underground ...

The El Rey Network reached an agreement with Dish Network in January, the latest in a series of television deals that has included Time Warner Cable, Cox Communications, and DirecTV. A collaboration between director Robert Rodriguez and FactoryMade Ventures, El Rey achieved its initial breakthrough when Comcast, during its effort to acquire majority interest in NBCUniversal, conceded to Congressional pressure to add more minority-owned channels to its lineup. El Rey became one of those networks.

And El Rey made a smooth move on January 26, when an impending blizzard forced *Raw*'s retreat to its Stamford, Connecticut, studios. The network aired two episodes of *Lucha Underground*—which included the crowning of Prince Puma as the first LU champion—directly against *Raw* at 8:30 and 9:30 p.m. Eastern.

TV BREAKDOWN

RAW [USA]

-VIEWERS IN MILLIONS

December 1: 3.86
December 8: 3.68
December 15: 3.51
December 22: 3.62
December 29: 3.47
January 5: 3.75
January 12: 3.89
January 19: 4.09
January 26: 4.61

Analysis: The “Legends Reunion” edition of *Raw* broke the 3.0-barrier on January 19, a great number leading into The Royal Rumble. A blizzard in the U.S. Northeast prompted Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy to issue a travel ban, effectively canceling the January 26 *Raw* event at the XL Center in Hartford. Fortunately, that’s fairly close to WWE headquarters in Stamford, where Michael Cole, Booker T, and John Bradshaw Layfield hosted *Raw* live from WWE Studios. *Raw* featured Brock Lesnar’s successful World title defense over John Cena and Seth Rollins from the previous night’s Royal Rumble, in addition to Roman Reigns’ win in the actual Rumble. These two matches, and the novelty of the studio setting, helped *Raw* score an impressive 3.3 rating, its highest number since April 7, 2014, the night after WrestleMania 30.

SMACKDOWN [SYFY]

-VIEWERS IN MILLIONS

December 5: 2.48
December 12: 2.53
December 16: 2.03
December 26: 2.00
January 2: 2.49
January 9: 2.43
January 15: 2.68
January 22: 2.81
January 29: 2.95

Analysis: Daniel Bryan’s return after a nine-month hiatus helped drive the January 15 edition of *Smackdown* to a 2.0 rating, a sign that the move to Thursday nights was a good one. *Smackdown* has maintained that 2.0 rating ever since moving to Thursdays, above its average 2014 rating of 1.9 for Friday nights. The program rose one-tenth of a ratings point for a live edition on January 29, which featured Bryan’s victory over Kane in a casket match and Roman Reigns’ win over The Big Show. Byron Saxton and Jerry Lawler replaced Tom Phillips and JBL on the announce team when the show moved to Thursdays. Cole has moved over to the center position, which he already occupies on *Raw*. Unlike Phillips, Saxton has taken on more of a color commentary role. We’ll see if Saxton can succeed in this difficult assignment.

IMPACT [DESTINATION AMERICA]

-VIEWERS IN MILLIONS

Analysis: *Impact Wrestling* went on a six-week hiatus between its last episode on Spike and its premiere on Destination America. The most obvious change is former WWE announcer Josh Matthews has replaced Mike Tenay in the play-by-play position, with Taz remaining as color commentator. They make no secret of the fact they’re doing their work from a broadcast booth in Nashville, rather than at ringside in real time. It seems the production crew is embracing the

January 7: .36
January 16: .39
January 23: .52

lower-budget feel rather than working against it.

TV MATCH OF THE MONTH

**DANIEL BRYAN
 VS. SETH ROLLINS,
 RAW, FEBRUARY 2**



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INDEPENDENT ROUNDUP

BY MIKE BESSLER

BUZZWORTHY. Fresh. Exciting. Wrestling enthusiasts don't exactly throw terms like those around with wanton abandon these days. But the men and women of Lucha Underground are slowly converting a relatively small fan base into an enthusiastic

army of goodwill ambassadors for their fledgling product. Lucha Underground's inaugural champion **Prince Puma**—known to the savviest of fans as indy high-flyer **Ricochet**—brings a lot of street cred to the table for the company, for sure. After winning Lucha Un-

derground's heavyweight title late last year by surviving a 20-man battle royal, Puma defended the strap in a match televised on the El Rey Network on January 14. Taking on the masked luchador **Fenix**, Puma narrowly escaped a few near-falls and stayed in the hunt with a strong offensive game and impressive maneuvers. Well into the bout, Fenix looked to put things away with a 450 splash, but even that aerial assault couldn't seal the deal. In the end, it was a 630 senton by Puma that stopped Fenix long enough to garner the three-count.

Ybor City, Florida, was the site of a rollicking doubleheader for Full Impact Wrestling and EVOLVE on January 9. In the FIP portion of the event, West Coast heavy hitter "Big Country" **Jody Kristofferson** defeated **Johnny Vandal** via DQ and FIP tag champs **David Starr** and **J.T. Dunn**—also known as **Juicy Product**—retained the title by defeating **The Savages**, **Eddie Graves** and **Teddy Stigma**. EVOLVE's Ricochet beat **Timothy Thatcher** with a shooting star press. **Uhaa Nation** teamed up with **AR Fox** to defeat **The Bravado Brothers**. In the main event, **Drew Galloway** met **Roderick Strong** in a grudge match that couldn't be contained by ringposts and ropes. The men fought out into the crowd, throughout the venue's bar area, and even outside for a short spell. When the combatants made it back into the ring, they tried to introduce



Prince Puma exults after successfully turning back Fenix's play for his Lucha Underground title in Los Angeles. Wrestling under his more familiar name, Ricochet's challenge for the EVOLVE title in Ybor City, Florida, was turned aside by Drew Galloway.

PHOTO BY LOUIS TRINH/EL REY NETWORK



AHTU lets out a shout as he stands over the soon-to-be vanquished Marci Cabrera. AHTU's star is rising, and now his growing resume includes being the first-ever Sanctuary champion.

folding chairs into the fight, and at that point, the ref called for the bell and declared a double-disqualification. Galloway's EVOLVE title wasn't up for grabs in that match, but he did put it on the line at the company's show the following night, defeating Ricochet by pinfall.

"The God King" **AHTU** brought the house down at Sanctuary's "7.0" show in Hazelton, Pennsylvania, on January 25. After coming into the 30-man contest at number 20, the brawling behemoth promptly cleared out the entire Sanctuary tag division from the ring before pressing on to his final battle against the promotion's first-ever student, **Marci Cabrera**. Although the big-hearted Cabrera fought valiantly, AHTU set him up for the finish with a massive lariat that he unabashedly refers to as "The Rapture." He then unceremoniously tossed Cabrera out of the ring and to the floor below, signaling the end of the rumble and the beginning of AHTU's reign as Sanctuary's first-ever heavyweight champion.

NWA heavyweight champion **Rob Conway** underwent emergency surgery for acute appendicitis on January 14 after suffering a bout of unusual abdominal pain. NWA CEO **Bruce Tharpe** advised that the surgery went well and that Conway hopes to bounce back in time for a scheduled tour of Japan ... Imperial Wrestling Entertainment has inked a deal with New York's Manhattan Neighborhood Network to bring the promotion's product to TV screens in the Big Apple. Based out of Central Michigan, IWE has now grown to include six markets in its home state, as well as worldwide exposure on the Roku Network via the Indie Wrestling Channel ... A long-awaited bout between **Kekoa** and **Bobby Shields** finally made it to bell time at ECWA's January 17 show in Woodbury Heights, New Jersey. Still boiling over the betrayal of his former BFF Kekoa, Shields hit the ring loaded for bear. Things quickly got out of hand as the two took their battle out of the ring and all around

the venue. In the end, both men were counted out ... **CHIKARA** held its "Season Premiere" show on January 25 in Philadelphia (just miles from WWE's Royal Rumble), capping the night with a Grand Championship bout between **Icarus** and **Chuck Taylor**. Icarus managed to hold on to the title, but the egregious displays of underhanded tactics by both men throughout the contest didn't sit well with fans. On the undercard, **UltraMantis Black** beat **Juan Francisco de Coronado** and **Kevin Condrón** defeated **Eddie Kingston** via disqualification ... Brute force and methodical tactics are the key factors behind **Josef von Schmidt's** rapid ascent to the top echelons of the Allied Independent Wrestling Federations national rankings. After vanquishing the likes of AR Fox, **Apollo**, and **Sol de Oro**, the Prussian predator is a veritable scrape away from a shot at **Justin Overstreet's** heavyweight title. But at some point, he'll have to go through **T.R. Superstar** to get his hands on the gold ... Mid-Ohio Wrestling found a new champion in **Patrick Hayes** when he defeated **Tommy Chill** for the heavyweight title on January 24 in Barberton, Ohio. Earlier in the evening, **Wilbur Whitlock** kept his Tri-County heavyweight title by defeating **Jeff Meekins**...After scoring heavyweight gold in a host of California-based promotions over the past several years, "**Double D**" **Dave Dutra** hung up his boots in December, deciding that it was time to move on in life. Dutra told family, friends, and fans that he'd made a pledge to his wife and to himself that if he hadn't made wrestling a full-time career by the age of 30, he'd retire. Highly regarded by his peers, Dutra credits his success in the West Coast indy scene to the late **Roland Alexander**. Happy trails, Dave. □

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

BY DAN MURPHY

NEW JAPAN'S SUZUKIGUN stable has invaded Pro Wrestling NOAH, and both promotions are bracing for a conflict that could have massive ramifications throughout the country.

At Wrestle Kingdom 9, the NOAH team of **Mikey Nicholls**, **Shane Haste**, **Naomichi Marufuji**, and **Toru Yano** defeated the Suzukigun squad of **Lance Archer**, **Davey Boy Smith Jr.**, **Shelton Benjamin**, and **Takashi Iizuka**. Still bristling over that loss, the entire Suzukigun stable made a surprise appearance at a Pro Wrestling NOAH event on January 10, following NOAH GHC champion **Marufuji's** successful title defense against **Satoshi Kojima**.

Suzukigun members Iizuka, Benjamin, Smith Jr., Archer, **Minoru Suzuki**, **El Desperado**, **Taichi**, **Taka Michinoku**, and **Takashi** stormed the ring and beat down wrestlers and staff at ringside, allowing Suzuki—the leader of the faction—to lay out Marufuji with a Gotch piledriver.

When Nicholls and Haste attempted to make the save, they were cut down by NWA tag team champions Archer and Smith. Suzuki declared war on the NOAH promotion, promising that Suzukigun will take all of the company's championships by force.

Shortly before press time, Marufuji agreed to put his title on the line against Suzuki. Mean-

while, the Suzukigun invaders have joined the ongoing NOAH tour, and are wreaking havoc against NOAH competitors with their gangland-style attacks.

This invasion could be a threat to the overall health of Pro Wrestling NOAH, a company that has struggled in recent years. If Suzukigun is able to achieve its goal of taking the promotion's top titles and bringing them back to New Japan, NOAH will suffer a stigma of having lost its identity to a rival faction. That could be a death knell for a promotion in today's turbulent climate.

In other news from Japan, **Go Shiozaki** captured the All Japan Pro Wrestling Triple Crown title on



New Japan's Suzukigun stable, led by Minoru Suzuki (holding microphone), could determine the fate of the entire Pro Wrestling NOAH promotion. Suzuki's men have launched repeated gangland style attacks at NOAH wrestlers and are determined to win every NOAH title.



Albert El Patron forces Shane Sewell to relinquish the WWL heavyweight title in Puerto Rico with a cross-armbreaker. The other combatant in the three-way, El Mesias, tries in vain to get back in the ring before Sewell taps.

January 3 in Tokyo, beating American **Joe Doering** in dramatic fashion with a series of lariats.

Shiozaki, a two-time former Pro Wrestling NOAH GHC champion, gave up six inches and almost 50 pounds, but he fended off Doering's stiff clotheslines and power-based offense long enough to wear down the champion. Shiozaki took advantage of a fatigued Doering and was able to counter the champ's attempt at his finisher, the Revolution Bomb spinning power bomb, shifting his weight and throwing Doering to the mat. A series of running lariats finished the job.

Albert El Patron has been a busy man since leaving WWE. In addition to appearing in ROH and Lucha Underground, and winning the AAA heavyweight title in Mexico, the former **Alberto Del Rio** showed up in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where he captured the World Wrestling League heavyweight title on January 6, beating champion "**Glamour Boy**" **Shane Sewell** and "**El Mesias**" **Ricky Banderas** in a three-way title bout.

Wrestle Kingdom 9 was presented on pay-per-view in the U.S. by **Jeff Jarrett's** new promotion, Global Force Wrestling. In an inter-

view with wrestlinginc.com, Jarrett said he was very pleased with the show, but that he's keeping his eye on the bottom line.

"I'm waiting for numbers and I'm more anxious than anyone else in this world is," Jarrett said. "We're analyzing data from everywhere, even the piracy that everyone knows exist out there. The numbers we've heard are very high traffic in that world. That usually translates to high pay-per-view buys, but we'll see."

So far, Jarrett has kept mum on the topic of upcoming Global Force events or co-promotional efforts.

Japanese joshi competitor **Syuri** captured the CMLL (Mexico) Women's championship on December 12 in Tokyo, beating **Marcela** in a best-of-three falls contest. Marcela had held the championship since March 2012, and Syuri's victory was widely seen as a surprise. Syuri became the sixth Japanese woman to hold the CMLL Women's title.

World Wrestling Council promoter **Victor Jovica** declared the WWC Universal heavyweight title vacant following a controversial bout between **Ray Gonzalez** and **Carly Colon**. Gonzalez defeated

Colon to win the championship on January 4 in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, marking the 20th time Gonzalez has held that title. However, two weeks later, Jovica overturned the decision and announced a three-way match between Gonzalez, Colon, and **The Mighty Ursus** to crown an undisputed champion.

Finally, the fifth annual Fantasicamania tour, featuring the stars of New Japan and CMLL, took place January 13 through January 19 at several arenas throughout Japan. The event pits lucha libre stars against some of the top stars in puroresu, mostly in tag team, trios, or eight-man tag team contests.

Highlights of the six-card tour included the team of **Atlantis** and **Mascara Dorada** winning the Fantasicamania 2015 Tag Team Tournament (beating **Gran Guerrero** and **Ultimo Guerrero** in the final round), Ultimo Guerrero defeating Atlantis in a rematch of their classic mask-vs.-mask match from last September, and a star-studded eight-man tag bout that saw Atlantis, **Hiroshi Tanahashi**, **Kota Ibushi**, and **Volador Jr.** defeat the team of **Gran Guerrero**, **Kazuchika Okada**, **Shinsuke Nakamura**, and Ultimo Guerrero. □

ARENA REPORTS

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SPOTLIGHT CARD OF THE MONTH

PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA—WWE Royal Rumble at the Wells Fargo Center: **Cesaro & Tyson Kidd** beat **Big E & Kofi Kingston** ... **The Ascension** (Konnor & Viktor) defeated **The New Age Outlaws** (Billy Gunn & Road Dogg) ... Tag team champions **Jimmy & Jey Uso** beat **The Miz & Damien Mizdow** ... **Brie & Nikki Bella** defeated **Natalya & Paige** ... World heavyweight champion **Brock Lesnar** beat **John Cena** and **Seth Rollins** in a triple-threat ... **Roman Reigns** won the 30-man Royal Rumble, last eliminating **Rusev**.

(01-25-15)

—Spotlight photos by George Napolitano

ALABAMA

MOBILE—WWE at the Mobile Civic Center: **Kofi Kingston** pinned Intercontinental champion **Bad News Barrett** in a non-title match ... **Los Matadores** (Diego, Fernando, & El Torito) beat **Titus O'Neil, David Otunga, & Hornswoggle** ... **Fandango** pinned **Curtis Axel** ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Luke Harper** ... **Dean Ambrose** defeated **Bray Wyatt** ... **Natalya & Paige** beat **The Bella Twins** ... **Big E & Xavier Woods** beat **Tyson Kidd & Cesaro** and **Goldust & Stardust** ... **John Cena** pinned **Seth Rollins** in a streetfight.

(01-11-15)

—Roger Montgomery

MONTGOMERY—WWE at the Garrett Coliseum: **Kofi Kingston** pinned Intercontinental champion **Bad News Barrett** in a non-title match ... **Los Matadores** (Diego & Fernando) beat **Titus O'Neil & David Otunga** ... **Fandango** pinned **Curtis Axel** ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Luke Harper** ... **Dean Ambrose** defeated **Bray Wyatt** ... **Natalya** beat **Paige** ... **Big E & Xavier Woods** beat **Tyson Kidd & Cesaro** and **Goldust & Stardust** ... **John Cena** pinned **Seth Rollins** in a streetfight.

(01-10-15)

—Roger Montgomery

ARIZONA

TUCSON—High Impact Wrestling at the Tanque Verde Swap Meet: **Ricky Flash, Fuerza Aeria, & Hippie** defeated **Pali Price & Caudillo & Rudy Escobedo** ... **Joey Law** pinned **Narval** ... **24/7** (Roman Alexander & Chaos) defeated **The Unholy Alliance** (Mac Havok & Tyrone Cabrone) and **Orge & Rave Michaels-Martel** in a three-way ... **EJ Sparks** beat **Cody Baker** and **Criss Syndell** in a three-way ... **Shot Saxon** pinned **Azteca** ... **Matthew Blaze** pinned **Outrage**.

(01-11-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

CALIFORNIA

SOUTH GATE—AWS/Wrestling Cares Association Race for the Ring Tournaments at American Legion Post #335: *Non-tournament*: Heavyweight champion **B-Boy** beat **Papadon** and **Johnny Gargano** in a three-way ... **Candice LeRae, Brittany Wonder, & Datura** beat **Raze, Kikyo Nakamura, & Kitana Vera** ... **Papadon & Johnny Gargano** beat **B-Boy & Willie Mack** ... **Mariachi Loco** beat lightweight champion **Famous B, El Ridiculoso, Ryan**

Taylor, Lil Cholo, & SoCal Crazy in a six-way points match for the title ... *Women's Tournament—Quarterfinals*: **Mariah Moreno** beat **Kikyo Nakamura** ... **Sage Sin Supreme** beat **Brittany Wonder** ... **Kahmora** beat **Raze** ... **Nicole Savoy** defeated **Taeler Hendrix** ... **Hania** beat **Datura** ... **Christina Von Eerie** beat **Candice LeRae** ... *Semifinals*: **Nicole Savoy** beat **Kahmora** ... **Hania** beat **Sage Sin Supreme** ... **Mariah Moreno** defeated **Christina Von Eerie** ... *Final*: **Nicole Savoy** beat **Hania** and **Mariah Moreno** in a three-way ... *Tag Team Tournament—Quarterfinals*: Tag team champions **PPRay** (Peter Avalon & Ray Rosas) beat **Los Luchas** (Phoenix Star & Zokre) ... **Reno Scum** (Adam Thornstowe & Lester the Legend) beat **Revolution** (Sasha Drevko & Fidel Bravo) ... **Los Bandidos** (Rico Dynamite & Tito Escondido) defeated **Footloose** (Todd Chandler & Daniel Joseph) ... **Forever Hooligans** (Rocky Romero & Alex Koslov) beat **Suburban Commandos** (T-Rent & D-Unit) ... *Semifinals*: **PPRay** defeated **Los Bandidos** ... **Forever Hooligans** beat **Reno Scum** ... *Final*: **PPRay** beat **Forever Hooligans**.

(01-23/24-15)

—Chad Simplicio



Cesaro goes high to take out Big E, as he and his Masters of the Universe teammate, Tyson Kidd, open the show by stopping The New Day.

SANTA MARIA—Vendetta Pro Reflexion 2015 at the Santa Maria Fairpark: Western States title tournament—*Quarterfinals*: Brian Kendrick pinned Ricardo Rodriguez ... Jody Kristofferson pinned Chris Masters ... Rik Luxury pinned Billy Blade ... Matt Riviera beat Americos by submission ... *Semifinals*: Brian Kendrick pinned Jody Kristofferson ... Matt Riviera beat Rik Luxury by countout ... *Final*: Matt Riviera pinned Brian Kendrick for the vacant title ... Levi Shapiro, Buddy Royal, Alexander G. Bernard, Perry Von Vicious, & Judah Mathew defeated Mike Rayne, Ricky Ruffin, Clay Tawzer, J.D. Horror, & T-Lo the Insano in an elimination tag team match ... Joey Ryan pinned Jacob Diez ... Tri-Force champion Jeckles the Jester beat Sunami and Vintage Dragon in a three-way ... WWA tag team champions Damian 666 & Bestia 666 defeated Shane & Shannon Ballard. (01-17-15)

—Joseph Duncan

PORT HUENEME—Championship Wrestling from Hollywood at the Oceanview Pavilion: MavTV champion Ryan Taylor beat Scorpio Sky by submission ... Tag team champions PPRay (Peter Avalon & Ray Rosas) beat Matthew Scott & Dom De La Vega in a non-title match ... Jakob Austin Young beat Suede Thompson and Mike Camden in a three-way ... Heritage champion Hobo pinned Willie Mack ... *Percy Pringle III Memorial Cup Tournament, Quarterfinals*: Johnny Yuma pinned Shaun Ricker, eventually earning a bye in the semifinals ... James Morgan pinned Sasha Drevko ... Joey Ryan vs. Ray Rosas ended in a double-countout ... Timothy Thatcher beat Che Cabrera by submission ... *Semifinal*: James Morgan pinned Timothy Thatcher ... *Final*: Johnny Yuma pinned James Morgan. (01-11-15)

—Chad Simplicio

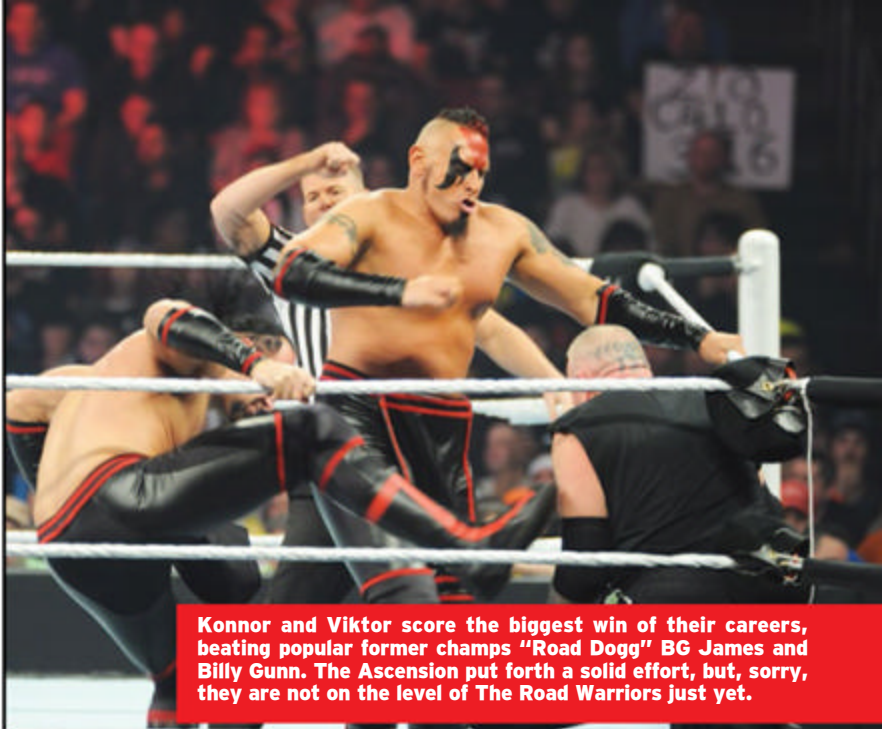
SACRAMENTO—WWE at the Sleep Train Arena: Justin Gabriel beat Adam Rose ... Darren Young vs. Tyler Breeze ended in a no-contest ... Kane defeated Jack Swagger ... Tag team champions Jey & Jimmy Uso beat The Miz & Damien Mizdow ... Sin Cara defeated Alex Riley ... Naomi, Emma, & Summer Rae defeated Alicia Fox, Cameron, & Sasha Banks ... Roman Reigns beat U.S. champion Rusev by DQ. (01-10-15)

—Artie Malone

FLORIDA

YBOR CITY—Shine Wrestling at the Orpheum: Amber Galloway beat Amanda Rodriguez ... Jayme Jameson & Marti Belle beat Luscious Latasha & Solo Darling ... Taylor Made defeated Jessica James ... Leva Bates defeated Su Yung ... Allysin Kay beat Athena ... Cherry Bomb, Kimber Lee, & Leah Von Dutch beat Brandi Wine, Malia Hosaka, & Thunderkitty ... Champion Mia Yim defeated Santana Garrett. (01-23-15)

—Al Haft



Konnor and Viktor score the biggest win of their careers, beating popular former champs "Road Dogg" BG James and Billy Gunn. The Ascension put forth a solid effort, but, sorry, they are not on the level of The Road Warriors just yet.

MIAMI—Ronin Pro Wrestling at the Miami Airport Convention Center: Donovan defeated Gregory Edwards ... Shane Douglas beat Jeff Boom ... Jesse Sorensen defeated Joey Bricco ... Jonny Vandal & Al Snow beat Teddy Stigma & Eddie Graves ... Joey Bricco won a 20-man battle royal ... Mikaze beat Matt Sydal. (01-17-15)

—Steve Mesa

ORLANDO—I Believe in Wrestling at the Team Vision Dojo: Joey Mayberry beat Josh Parker ... Alex Pourteau beat Russell Payne ... Santana Garrett defeated Josh Hess ... Brandon Scherer beat Alex Calderon ... Chasyn Rance defeated Gabriel Black ... Maxwell Chicago defeated Tyranus ... Michael Patrick & Leo Brien beat Rhett Giddins & Chico Adams. (01-17-15)

—Al Haft

MILTON—Combat Sport Pro at the Milton Community Center: Santos defeated CJ Shooter & Nick Francis ... Scotty Rayz beat Darias Caine and Ethan Case in triple-threat ... Airman Banks pinned Ryan Oshun ... The Dirty Blonds (Leo Brien & Michael Patrick) defeated Josh & Dusty Payne ... Becca Payne defeated Lexxi ... Brian Caige pinned Rebel Boy ... Jaxson James pinned John Skyler ... Joe Kane defeated Aeon Flexx ... Heavyweight champion Suicydal Soulja vs. Lucha Locura ended in a no-contest. (01-11-15)

—Mike Roycroft

FORT PIERCE—WWE NXT at the Fenn Center: Buddy Murphy & Wesley Blake beat Dash Wilder & Scott Dawson ... Kevin Owens pinned Elias Sampson ... Finn Balor pinned C.J. Parker ... Baron Corbin pinned Jason Jordan ... Charlotte & Bayley beat Becky Lynch & Carmella ... Hideo Itami pinned Solomon Crowe ... The Vaudevillains (Aiden

English & Simon Gotch) beat Enzo & Collin Cassady ... Heavyweight champion Sami Zayn pinned Adrian Neville. (01-10-15)

—Duane Long

WINTER PARK—Full Impact Pro at the Trinity Preparatory School: Heavyweight champion Rich Swann beat Roderick Strong by DQ ... Lince Dorado beat Gary Jay ... Martin Stone & Michael Tarver co-won a Flash Fray, also featuring Aaron Epic, Aaron Solo, Earl Cooter, Jack Jameson, Jason Cade, Jody Kristofferson, Jonny Vandal, Mega Mo, and Rhett Giddins ... Teddy Hart beat Bolt Brady and Jesus DeLeon in a three-way ... Santana Garrett beat Mia Yim ... Maxwell Chicago defeated Josh Hess ... Maxwell Chicago defeated Deimos ... Florida Heritage champion Chasyn Rance defeated Maxwell Chicago ... Eddie Graves & Teddy Stigma beat Eddie Cruz & Jay Rios, Evan Gelistico & Pierre Abernathy, and David Starr & JT Dunn in a four-way for the tag team title. (01-10-15)

—Brett Wolverton

FORT MYERS—New Era Wrestling at the Riverside Community Center: The Lusty Latinos (Rome & Cubantude) defeated Michael Kai Rayne in an handicap match ... Lena Taylor pinned Guy Franchise ... Michael Sky pinned Bill Duffy ... Syther pinned lightweight champion Joey Bydafoodcourt for the title ... Zack Monstar defeated Mike Dubz in a no-DQ match ... Donnie Abel & Prestin Caine beat Richie Paradise & Jahmel Fortune and Blanco Loco & Carrion in a three-way ... Tim Serrago pinned DB Harrison ... Dravin Frost pinned Richie Paradise in a gauntlet match ... Dravin Frost defeated Giovanni the Greatest & Justin Matthews in a handicap match ... Dravin Frost vs. Zack Monstar ended in a no-contest. (01-06-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

ORLANDO—Orlando Pro Wrestling at the Team Vision Dojo: **Aaron Epic** beat **Kafka** ... **Joey Mayberry** beat **Russell Payne** ... **Chasyn Rance** defeated **Miguel Mason** ... **Tyranus** beat **Alex Calderon** ... **Josh Parker** defeated **Chico Adams** ... **Gabriel Black** beat **Vincent DiBacco** ... **Team Epic** (Aaron Epic, Gabriel Black, Josh Parker) beat **Team Chasyn** (Chasyn Rance, Joey Mayberry, & Tyranus). (01-04-15)

—Al Haft

GEORGIA

ROCHESTER—UPW at the Eagles Club: **Masked Assassinette** defeated **Women's champion LaDiva** for the title ... **Colin Delaney** defeated **Cloudy** and **Cheech** in a triple-threat ... **The Easy Riders** defeated **Eric Rosecroft** & **Steve Gage** ... **Tylicious**, **Coleman Jackson**, & **Victor Lord** beat **Chris Cayden**, **Dewey Murray**, & **Ron Falco** ... **Tag team champions The**

MONROE—Southern Fried Championship Wrestling at the Nowell Recreation Center: **Terry Lawler** pinned **Mad Dog Joe** ... **Mike Cruz** pinned cruiserweight cup champion **Kameron Kade** for the title ... **Colt Calloway** defeated **Tommy Penirelli** by DQ ... **Monroe City champion Kody Jack** defeated **Damien Silva** and **Lobo** in a triple-threat ... **Twisted** pinned **Clyde Braddock** ... **Jagged Edge** & **Tetchi Makuji** beat **Cowboy Way** (**Roscoe Ray** & **Jamie Holmes**) ... **Johnny Swinger** pinned **Nigel Sherrod** ... **Trinity** (**Big Andy** & **Tim Rice**) beat tag team champions **The Silent Kill Syndicate** (**Azrael** & **Supernatural**) by DQ ... **The Dream Team** (**Josh Storm** & **Pandora**) defeated **The Bald Beautiful Besties** (**Michael Stevens** & **Zac Edwards**) in a falls-count-anywhere streetfight ... **Chip Day** pinned **Drew Adler** ... **Team Georgia** (**A.J. Steele**, **Logan Creed**, & **Jagged Edge**) vs. **Team Florida** (**Francisco Ciatso**, **Simon Sez**, & **Leo Gold**) ended in a double-countout. (01-03-15)

—Brett Wolverton

Powers by DQ. (01-17-15)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

VILLA PARK—GALLI Lucha Libre at the New GALLI Arena: **International Assassins** (**Gavilan**, **Kunai Silencio**, & **Golde Dragon**) defeated **La Maldicion** (**Mojo McQueen**, **Ovirload**, & **Draconis**) ... **Mason Conrad** beat **Chico Suave** & **Encantador Valentino** in a handicap match ... **4-Star Heroes** (**Matt Knicks** & **Chris Castro**) defeated **Soul Touchaz** (**Marshe Rockett** & **Willie Richardson**) ... **Furia** & **Rey Furia** defeated **Beauty & the Beast** (**Stevie Fierce** & **Rob Matter**) ... **Mike Anthony** & **Will Dolla** defeated **El Payaso GALLI** & **Punisher 747** ... **Team GALLI** (**Pentagono**, **Alas D Fuego**, & **Destructor Jr.**) defeated **Team ELLMEX** (**Imperio Azteca**, **Atomicio**, **Destructor Sr.**, & **Destructor Alfa**) ... **Barry Rytte** & **Ricky Cruz** defeated **GPA** & **Acid Jaz**. (01-11-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

JERSEYVILLE—World Powerhouse Wrestling at the American Legion: **Heavyweight title tournament, Round One**: **Ivan Stroganov** beat **Paradox** by submission ... **Xavier Frost** beat **Alexander Steele** by submission ... **Scar** pinned **Wapo Choncho** ... **Uriah Elezar** pinned **Victor Cortez** ... **Semifinals**: **Xavier Frost** beat **Uriah Elezar** by forfeit ... **Scar** pinned **Ivan Stroganov** ... **Final**: **Xavier Frost** pinned **Scar** ... **U.S. champion Bioshock** beat **Curtis Payne** and **Gauge Evans** in a triple-threat. (01-10-15)

—Chip Leffler

LITCHFIELD—Proving Ground Pro at the Community Center: **Ryan Buckley Memorial Tournament Round Quarterfinals**: **Blake Steel** beat **Louis Lyndon** ... **Ethan Page** defeated **Mallaki Kirkpatrick** ... **Tommaso Ciampa** beat **Mario Crivello** ... **Justice Jones** defeated **Tyson Dux** ... **Semifinals**: **Blake Steel** beat **Ethan Page** ... **Tommaso Ciampa** defeated **Justice Jones** ... **Finals**: **Blake Steel** defeated **Tommaso Ciampa** ... **Perfect Addiction** (**Randy Ray** & **Perry Winkle**) beat **Mike Outlaw** & **Mr. Nice** ... **Zero Gravity** (**Brett Gakiya** & **CJ Esparza**) defeated **Team IOU** (**Nick Iggy** & **Kerry Awful**) ... **Franchise champion Jake Dirden** defeated **Action Jackson** and **Jon Bolen** in a three-way. (01-10-15)

—Brian Kelley

GRANITE CITY—Pro Wrestling Championship Series at the YMCA: **The Hooligans** (**Devin** & **Mason Cutter**) defeated **Mad Dog McDowell** & **Barackus** ... **Paco Gonzalez** pinned **Danny Adams** ... **Steven Kennedy** beat **Dangerous Deveroux** ... **Dan Walsh** defeated **Colt Cabana** ... **Alex Castle** beat **Ozzie Gallagher**, **Steve O. Reno**, **Chuey Martinez**, **Justin D'Air**, and **Jeff Gant** in a six-way ... **Davey Vega** & **Mat Fitchett** beat **The Viking War Party** (**Alexandre Rudolph** & **Jake Parnell**) in a no-DQ match ... **J.D. Riggs** pinned **Adam Rich** ... **The Blacklist** (**Makaze**, **Outkast**, **Jojo Bravo**, & **Nate Redwing**) defeat-



The Usos display the type of teamwork against The Miz that helped them win the balloting for PWI Tag Team of the Year. Miz and stunt double Damien Mizdow will be fortunate to finish this year as a team.

MOTN Lions defeated **The Rochester Wrecking Crew** ... **Mattick** beat **No Limits champion Gabreal Saint** in a 30-minute Iron Man match for the title ... **Rik Matrix** defeated **Milliman** ... **Bobby Dipinto** beat **Jordan Falco**, **Jason Savior**, **Terrell Kenneth**, **Anthony Gaines**, and **Krist Worthless** in a scramble match ... **Heavyweight champion Coconut Jones** vs. **Maximo Suave** was ruled a draw when both men pinned each other. The match was restarted and **Jones** pinned **Suave** to retain the title. (01-10-15)

—Todd Brantley

ROYSTON—APW at Royston Gym: **Brandon Parker** defeated **CB Suave** ... **Kevin Blue** beat **Scott Mayson** ... **Strykyn** defeated **Will Kaution** ... **Ethan Case** beat **Marco Polo** ... **Southern States champ James Boulevard** defeated **Red Ninja** ... **Jeremy Vain** beat **Bolo** by DQ. (01-09-15)

—Brian Edens

PORTERDALE—Platinum Championship Wrestling at the Main Event Arena: **Trey Williams** pinned **Velvet Jones** ... **Trevor Aeon** beat **Joe Black** by DQ ... **NWA Continental champion William Huckaby** pinned **Brian Blaze** ... **Heavyweight champion Shane Marx** defeated **Geter** in a 60-minute Iron Man match, three falls to two. (01-03-15)

—Steve Johnson

ILLINOIS

EAST CARONDELET—Southern Illinois Championship Wrestling at the Community Center: **Curtis Wyld** pinned **Shorty Biggs** ... **Daniel Gunner** defeated **Keith Smith Jr.** ... **Daniel Eads** beat **Bubba Troll** ... **Chaz Wesson** pinned **Ax Allwardt** ... **Sean Vincent** vs. **Brandon Espinosa** ended in a time-limit draw ... **Gary Jackson** & **Jim Hoffarth** beat **Ricky Cruz** & **Ken Kasa** ... **Classic champion Flash Flanagan** beat **Jake Dirden** ... **Attila Kha** defeated **Ron**

ed **The Ego Busters** (Jimmy Jacobs, Jeremy Wyatt, Brandon Espinosa, & Hype Gotti).
(01-10-15)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

WOODSTOCK—Chicago Style Wrestling Northland at the VFW Post 5040: **Roy Flash Daniels** & **Mike Wendorf** defeated **Kid Twist** & **Beau Anderson** ... **Ricky the Janitor** pinned **Johnny Black** ... **Tri-State Air Strike** (Colin Smith & Chris Miller) defeated **Marcho Anthony** & **JW Lovely** ... **Brad Kevins** pinned **Tony Briggs** ... **Steve Boz** pinned **The French Cactus** ... **Colin Cambridge** pinned **Mitch Blake** ... **Acid Jaz** vs. **Shannon Moore** ended in a no-contest.
(01-10-15)

— Thomas J. Rude

INDIANA

BLOOMINGTON—Infinity Pro at National Guard Armory: Aero champion **Bret Havoc** pinned **Scotty Young** ... **Shane Mercer** defeated **Percy Davis** ... **Tripp Cassidy** vs. **Josh Crane** ended in a double-countout ... **Ace Perry** beat **Adam Bueller** and **Dale Patricks** in a three-way ... **Jake Omen** pinned **Austin Manix** ... Duos champions **Donnie** & **Jacob Hallows** beat **Handsome Vinnie** & **Southpaw Sonny** ... Grand champion **GT Vega** defeated **Micas Silva**
(01-24-15)

—Nate Stein

CLARKSVILLE—IWA Mid-South at Jammersz Rollerdom: **Breyer Wellington** pinned **Gary Jay** ... **Randi West** pinned **Thunderkitty** ... **Elements of Wrestling** (Kaden Sade & Matt Madison) defeated **Viking War Party** (Frank Wyatt & American Viking), **The Hooligans** (Devin & Mason Cutter), and **Team IOU** (Kerry Awful & Nick Iggy) in a four-way ... **Ace Perry** pinned **Zodiak** ... **Dale Patricks** defeated **Joseph Schwartz** in a barbed-wire match ... **Mitch Page** pinned **Josh Crow** ... **Kongo Kong** beat **Shane Mercer**, **Kongo Reed Bentley**, and **John Wayne Murdoch** in a gauntlet match.
(01-15-15)

— Thomas J. Rude

SEYMOUR—Emerge Wrestling's Emerge Championship Tournament at the Celebrations Event Center: *Quarterfinals*: **Donny Idol** pinned **Apollo Garvin** ... **Ace Perry** pinned **Joe Pittman** ... **Dash Venture** pinned **Damian Cole** ... **Ricky Ruckus** pinned **Kris Kaliber** ... *Semifinals*: **JD Mariani** (subbing for Ricky Ruckus) pinned **Ace Perry** ... **Donny Idol** pinned **Dash Venture** ... *Final*: **JD Mariani** pinned **Donny Idol**.
(01-10-15)

— Thomas J. Rude

EVANSVILLE—Coliseum Championship Wrestling at the Veterans Memorial Stadium: **Daniel Eads** pinned **Joey Riley** ... **Jacob Black** pinned **JP Lightning** ... **Chad Rockman** pinned **John Wayne Murdoch** ... **Mickie Knuckles** pinned **Shank Barzini** ... **Andrew Hunter** vs. **Shane Mercer** ended with a double-pin ... **Reed Bentley** vs. **Kerry Awful** ended in a

Natalya grimaces in pain as Nikki Bella pulls her hair. The Divas champ scored the win for her team after decking Natalya with a forearm.



no-contest ... **Derek Neal** pinned **Hyzaya**.
(01-03-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

MUNSTER—Crash Tested Wrestling at the Fairmeadow Community Church: **Matt Creed** pinned **Kenny Courageous** ... **Jarod Priest** pinned **Wild Windham** ... **Mike Strong** defeated **Austin Anarchy** in a last-man-standing match ... **Warrior King Montezuma** & **Flash Harris** defeated **Caribbean Cartel** (Luis Morales & Johnny Andrews) ... **Ace Bradley** defeated **Rion Skillz** by submission ... **The Beast** beat **Van Johnson** & **Star Spangled Saint** in a handicap match ... **Live Wire** pinned **Brutus Owen Westker**.
(01-03-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

JASPER—AIWF Young Blood Wrestling at the YBW Arena: **Maniac** defeated **Mike G**, **Freddy Reckless**, and **Matt Garvin** in a four-way ... **The Bruise Brothers** (R.J. Starr & Bart Maverick) defeated **Jed Walker** & **L'I Bink** ... **Thomas Cage** pinned **Sinister** ... **Adam Powers** pinned **Jason Williams** ... **Eric Michaels** pinned **Brandon Young**.
(01-03-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

LEWISBURG—All Star Wrestling at the House of Pain: **Jake Storm** pinned **Sexy C** ... **Ringmaster** pinned **Ray Dunnivant** ... **Jeremiah Plunkett** pinned **David Morton** ... **Shaun Fatal** beat **Larry Cooter** by countout ... **Mikey Dunn** & **Shawn Hoodrich** defeated **Gary Valiant** & **Lawrence**.
(01-03-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

ROCKWOOD—Mid-South Wrestling As-

sociation at the Rockford Armory: **Tristen Ramsey** pinned **Santos** ... **Mick O'Malley** pinned **Party Animal** ... **Shane Daniels** pinned **Scott Savage** ... **Cadillac Cowboy** pinned **Drew Game** ... **Zane Stevens** pinned super junior heavyweight champion **Stevie Armstrong** for the title ... **Death Row Inmates** defeated **Street Dreams** ... **Justin Overstreet** vs. **Toby Farley** ended in a time-limit draw.
(01-03-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

DAYTON—Rockstar Pro Wrestling at the Rockstar Pro Arena: **Kyle Kraven** defeated **Duke Beefhammer** and **Great American Beast** in a triple-threat ... **Zakk Spadez** defeated **Pompana Joe**, **Flex Jordan**, **Ace Perry**, **Jake Omen**, and **Zachary Wentz** in a six-man scramble ... **Eric Ryan** pinned **Nate Wings** ... **Derek Direction** pinned **Bruce Grey** ... **Lufisto** pinned **Heidi Lovelace** ... **Ganger** defeated **Matt Tremont** and **Mikael** in a three-way hardcore match ... **Alex Colon** pinned American Luchacore champion **Jeremiah** for the title ... **Aaron Williams** pinned **DJ Hyde** ... **Ron Mathis** pinned **Dustin Rayz** ... **BLK Jeez** pinned **Dave Crist** ... Heavyweight champion **Jake Crist** pinned **Chris Hero**.
(01-02-15)

—G. Bradley

KENTUCKY

PAINTSVILLE—Bluegrass Championship Wrestling at the Paintsville Recreation Center: **Mr. Guarantee** pinned **Hoss Cat Henry** ... Kentucky Pro heavyweight champion **The Super Assassin** defeated **Arson** by DQ ... **Solomon Hezikiah** pinned **Aiden Reigns** ... Tag

team champions **Country Swag** (Matty B. & Eugene Waldo) beat **Crash Jaxon & Jason Steele** ... Heavyweight champion **J.T. Walker** pinned **Johnny Suede** ... **Eugene Waldo** won a battle royal. (01-17-15)

—Frank Hobbs

SHOPVILLE—New Kentucky Zone Wrestling at the Old Shopville Gym: **The Super Assassin** pinned **The Widowmaker** ... Tag team champions **Team Beat Down** (Trash Kan Graham & Frank the Tank) defeated **Joe Money & John Strange** ... **Johnny Bad** beat heavyweight champion **Shawn Christopher** by DQ ... U.S. champion **Joe Edmonds** pinned **Terry Alan** ... Shawn Christopher, Trash Kan Graham, & Frank the Tank defeated **Chief Tomahawk, Bill Rich, & Johnny Bad**. (01-10-15)

—Frank Hobbs

LOUISIANA

SHREVEPORT—WWE at the Hirsch Memorial Coliseum: **Justin Gabriel** beat **Adam Rose** ... **Darren Young** vs. **Tyler Breeze** ended in a no-contest ... **Kane** defeated **Jack Swagger** ... Tag team champions **Jey & Jimmy Uso** beat **The Miz & Damien Mizdow** ... **Sin Cara** defeated **Alex Riley** ... **Naomi, Emma, & Summer Rae** defeated **Alicia Fox, Cameron, & Sasha Banks** ... **Roman Reigns** vs. U.S. champion **Rusev** ended in a no-contest. (01-11-15)

—Orie Barbeau

MASSACHUSETTS

WOBURN—Chaotic Wrestling at Elks Lodge: **Sean Burke** pinned **Adam Booker** ... **Brian Fury** beat **Mikey Webb** by submission ... Women's champion **Kasey Ray** pinned **Davienne** ... Tag team champions **Brian Milonas & Scotty Slade** beat **Damian Gibbs & Anthony Bowns** ... **Warbeard Hanson** pinned **Julian Starr** ... **Brandon Locke** pinned **Jimmy Preston** ... Heavyweight champion **Donovan Dijak** pinned **Mark Shurman**. (01-09-15)

—Dave Ratman

MICHIGAN

MELVINDALE—Pro Wrestling All Stars at Play Atlantis: **Jun Hado** pinned **CJ Anderson** ... **Jun Hado** pinned **Cory Lyon** ... **Jun Hado** pinned **Spanish Fly** ... **Jack Thriller** pinned **Jun Hado** ... **Jack Thriller** pinned **Deputy Dave** ... **Jack Thriller** pinned **Chris Moore** ... **Frank Isaac Anderson** pinned **Jack Thriller** ... **Chuck Stein** pinned **Frank Isaac Anderson** ... **Jeff King** pinned **Chuck Stein** ... **Jeff King** beat **Great Akuma** by DQ ... **Movado** pinned **Jeff King** ... **Giant Kucuhmungah** pinned **Whip O'Doyle** ... Tag team champions **N8 Mattson & Breyer Wellington** beat **Atlas Hytower & Lance Star** ... Cruisercore champion **Chase Matthews** beat **Owen Travers** in a last-man-standing match ... **Necro Butcher** pinned heavyweight champion

Seth Rollins drops a knee from the turnbuckle to prevent John Cena from submitting to Brock Lesnar's Kimura Lock (right). Coming off a stretcher with a broken rib, Lesnar finishes the triple-threat by connecting with an F5 against Rollins (opposite page).



Roderick Street for the title. (01-23-15)

—Leonard Brand

PONTIAC—Juggalo Championship Wrestling at the Crofoot: **Shane Mercer** pinned **Zach Gowen** ... **Weedman** pinned **Warchild** ... **Kongo Kong** pinned **Jimmy Jacobs** ... **The Ring Rydas** defeated **Super Tiger & Spider Monkey** ... **Madman Pondo** pinned **Rude Boy** ... Heavyweight champion **2 Tuff Tony** pinned **Colt Cabana** for the title. (01-23-15)

—Leonard Brand

CLINTON TOWNSHIP—Xtreme Intense Championship Wrestling at the Imperial House: **Hakeem Zane** pinned **Malcom Monroe III** ... **Owen Travers** pinned **Austin Manix** ... **Caleb Stills** pinned **Taeler Hendrix** ... **Chris Sabin** pinned **Zach Gowen** ... **Danny Shay** pinned **Aaron TI** ... **Mark Gjoka & Joe Coleman** defeated **Movado & Willie Watts** ... **Rhino** pinned **Midwest champion Shannon Moore** for the title ... Intense champion **Orlando Christopher** pinned **TD Thomas** ... **The Scarbonis** beat tag team champions **Deathwish & The Fraternity** for the title ... **Super X Cup** lightweight belt tournament finals ... **Hakeem Zane** defeated **Chris Sabin, Caleb Stills, and Owen Travers** to win the **Super X Cup** tournament ... **The DBA & Jamey Cox** defeated **The Scarbonis** in a cage match. (01-17-15)

—Leonard Brand

TAYLOR—Clash Wrestling at the Tylortown Trade Center: **Brutus Dylan** pinned **Abe Jackson** ... **The Midnight Society** (Darrell Jackson & Maserati Rick) defeated **The Great Akuma & Jun Hado, Benny Boone & Space Monkey, and Jack Vaughn & Dave Manzo** in a four-way ...

Leah Von Dutch pinned **Jasmine** ... **Elk** pinned **Justin Mane** in a dog-collar chain match ... Tag team champions **The Clash** (Tommy Treznik & Cameron Sky) defeated **J. Miller & Marion Fontaine** by DQ ... Heavyweight champion **Cameron Sky** defeated **Dragon Greed** in a cage match. (01-17-15)

—Leonard Brand

CHESTERFIELD—Apex Pro Wrestling at the Diesel Concert Lounge: **Danny Shay** pinned **Caleb Stills** ... **Drew Fury** defeated **Chris Moore & Tommy Kline** ... **Movado** pinned **Mikey Smalls** ... **Arella Angel** pinned **Dominique** ... **Benny Boone** pinned **Grizzly House Jones** ... **Moe Evans** vs. **Evan Craig** ended in a double-countout ... **Kris Korvis & Bill Don John** won a battle royal to win the vacant tag team title ... **Jamey Cox** beat **Maserati Rick** ... **Chuck Wagon & Chris Carter** defeated **The Scarbonis** ... **Malice & Arella Angel** defeated **James Alexander & Dominique**. (01-10-15)

—Leonard Brand

MISSOURI

ST. LOUIS—WWE at the Scottrade Center: **Cesaro** defeated **Justin Gabriel** ... **R-Truth** beat **Fandango** ... Divas champion **Nikki Bella** defeated **Natalya** ... **Chris Jericho** defeated **Luke Harper** ... U.S. champion **Rusev** beat **Jack Swagger** ... **Dean Ambrose** defeated **Bray Wyatt** ... **John Cena** beat **Seth Rollins** in a cage match. (01-16-15)

—Ron Sadecki

FENTON—Dynamo Pro Wrestling at the Stratford Inn: **High Level Enterprise** (Jack Gamble & Jon Webb) defeated **Mauler McDarby & Everett Connors** ... **Ozzie**



Gallagher pinned Keon Option ... Spiral beat Brandon Aarons ... Brandon Espinosa defeated Dustin Bozworth ... Mariah Moreno pinned Lucy Mendez ... The Black Hand Warriors (Michael Magnuson, Dave DeLorean, & Jayden Fenix) beat Jackal, Shorty Biggs, & Outkast ... Heavyweight champion Mike Outlaw defeated Ken Kasa.
(01-03-15)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

NEVADA

LAS VEGAS—WWE at the Mandalay Bay Events Center: Tag team champions Jay & Jimmy Uso beat The Miz & Damien Mizdow ... Sin Cara pinned Tyson Kidd ... Jack Swagger beat Curtis Axel by submission ... Justin Gabriel pinned Adam Rose ... Dean Ambrose pinned Bray Wyatt in a streetfight ... Naomi, Paige, & Emma defeated Alicia Fox, Cameron, & Summer Rae ... Chris Jericho pinned Cesaro ... Roman Reigns beat U.S. champion Rusev by DQ.
(01-17-15)

—Renee Blau

NEW JERSEY

EAST RUTHERFORD—WWE at the Izod Center: Intercontinental champion Bad News Barrett beat Dolph Ziggler and Luke Harper in a triple-threat ... Darren Young pinned Tyson Kidd ... U.S. champion Rusev beat Erick Rowan by submission ... Chris Jericho pinned Cesaro ... Dean Ambrose & Roman Reigns beat Bray Wyatt & Big Show ... Natalya & Paige defeated Alicia Fox & Cameron ... Ryback pinned Kane ... John Cena pinned Seth Rollins in a cage match.
(01-24-15)

—George Tahinos

TRENTON—WWE at the Sun National Bank Center: Dolph Ziggler beat Intercontinental champion Bad News Barrett in a non-title match ... Darren Young pinned Tyson Kidd ... Erick Rowan pinned Luke Harper ... Chris Jericho pinned Cesaro ... Ryback pinned Kane ... Natalya & Paige defeated Alicia Fox & Cameron ... Dean Ambrose pinned Bray Wyatt ... John Cena beat Seth Rollins in a streetfight.
(01-23-15)

—Kevin McElvaney

WOODBURY—ECWA at the Woodbury Heights Community Center: Kid USA pinned Chris Rockwell ... Candi Cartwright vs. Renee Michelle ended in a time-limit draw ... JD Browning pinned Gabby Gilbert ... Chuck Payne pinned Sam Shields ... Bobby Shields vs. Kekoa ended in a double-countout ... Bloodbound Warriors (Red Scorpion & Grey Wolf) beat Mighty Mo's ... Chris Wyld & Breaker Morant defeated Kao Storm & Mark Harro ... Matt Saigon beat heavyweight champion Ricky Martinez by DQ.
(01-17-15)

—Joe Zanolle

VOORHEES—Combat Zone Wrestling at the Flyers Skate Club: Carter & McCall defeated Milk Chocolate (Randy Summers & Brandon Watts) ... Mike Bailey pinned Alex Colon ... The Beaver Boys defeated Team Tremendous ... Chris Dickinson pinned Dirty Buxx Belmar ... The Nation of Intoxication (Lucky tHURTeen & Devon Moore) beat The Genocide Junkies (Matt Tremont & Stockade) ... Joe Gacy pinned Jon Gresham ... Ohio Is 4 Killers (Jake & Dave Crist) defeated Pepper Parks & Papadon ...

BLK Jeez defeated Sozio in an ultraviolet streetfight.
(01-10-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

NEW YORK

DELANSON—In Your Face Wrestling at the Duaneburg Area Community Center: Good Lord Willing & Lance Madewell defeated Curly Q. Link & Larry Fine ... Tyler Vincent, Bill Slade, & Garrett Holiday defeated Damon Ravage, Prince Ashul-Naul, & Zach Clayton ... CJ Scott vs. Fronz Roddy ended in a time-limit draw ... Tag team champions Jamar Justice & Gabriel Soul beat Ricketty Rocket & Chip Stetson ... New Breed champion Elite Terrell defeated Ricky Williams ... Surma & S.O.G. beat Vigo & Sgt. Fury ... Drake Evans defeated Roman Dominguez by DQ.
(01-17-15)

—Joey Larocque

NORTH DAKOTA

REGENT—Badlands Original Wrestling at the Enchanted Castle: Josh Price pinned Danny Duggan ... Tommy Lee Curtis pinned Live Wire ... Hassan Payne pinned Animal Sam ... Charlie Midnite pinned Tyler Colton ... Animal Sam & Danny Duggan beat Hassan Payne & Josh Price.
(01-09-15)

—Sam Jesfjeld

OHIO

OREGON—Powerbomb Championship Wrestling at the International Boxing Club: James Abrams pinned Mikey Smalls ... Andy Chene pinned Kris Korvis ... Chuck Wagon pinned William Stud ... Jun Hado

& **Great Akuma** defeated **Justin Mane** & **James Alexander** to win the vacant tag team title ... **Phil Atlas** pinned **Rick Baker** to become the inaugural cruiserweight champion ... **Malice** beat heavyweight champion **Nitro** by countout. (01-25-15)

—Leonard Brand

MARION—NWA Midwest Championship Wrestling at the USW Local Hall: **Ryan Burke** pinned **Bryen Douglas** ... **Graham Wellington** pinned **Ganger** ... **Kaela** vs. **Angel Dust** ended in a no-contest ... **Generation Iron** defeated tag team champions **Incredibly Amazing** & **L33T** for the title ... **Kyle Maverick** pinned **Jesse McCoy** ... **Seth Allen** pinned heavyweight champion **Phil Monahan** for the title. (01-10-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

NELSONVILLE—Xtreme Wrestling Enter-

the **Rockstar Pro Arena**: **Nate Wings** pinned **Flex Jordan** ... **Bruce Grey**, **Kyle Maverick**, & **Kyle Kraven** defeated **Duke Beefhammer** & **High Fiving Fat Guys** (**Jon Murray** & **Bradley Abrams**) ... **Ganger** pinned **Big Jim Hutchinson** ... **Dustin Rayz** & **Aaron Williams** defeated **Jake Crist** & **Ron Mathis** ... **Draven** beat **Ace Perry**, **Jake Omen**, & **Zach Wentz** in a Fatal 4-Way ... **Zakk Spadez** pinned American Luchacore champion **Alex Colon** for the title ... **Dave Crist**, **Matt Taylor**, & **Pompano Joe** defeated **The Fight** (**Kyle Maverick**, **Jerrold Harris**, **Draven**, & **Samantha Heights**). (01-07-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

SOUTH CAROLINA

SPARTANBURG—Big Time Wrestling at the Memorial Auditorium: **George South** pinned **Cousin Larry** ... **Sledge Allen** defeated **Benny Juxx** ... **Jeff Lewis Neal**



Daniel Bryan excited the Philadelphia crowd when he went on the offensive against Bray Wyatt in the Rumble match, but he lasted a mere 10:11, touching off a harsh backlash from fans and media.

tainment at the Hocking College Student Center: **Flex Taylor** & **Rex Ultima** defeated **Ron Mathis** & **Sid Angel** ... **Dan Dawkins** won a gauntlet match ... **Dirk Extreme** pinned **Papa Dingo** ... **Otto Von Meister** & **Jock Samson** beat **Pretty in Pink** ... **Matt Taylor** beat **Levi Connors** by DQ ... **Duke Beefhammer** & **Jason Legend** defeated **Dane Stratmore** & **Chris Kahoz** ... **Jimmy Malloy** beat **Tommy Chill** and **Devlin Anderson** in a three-way. (01-10-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

PORTSMOUTH—Revolutionary Championship Wrestling at the Elk's City Lodge: **Flash Fury** defeated **Eclipse** in a falls-count-anywhere match ... **Devlin Anderson** pinned **Randy Allen** ... **DDK** pinned **Otto Von Meister** ... **Ron Mathis** beat **Dirk Extreme** in a no-DQ match ... **Jason Legend** pinned **Corey Mason** ... **James Avery** pinned **Duke Beefhammer** ... **Party Down Productions** beat **The Black & Blue Crew** in a fans- bring-the-weapons match ... **Onyx** pinned heavyweight champion **Tyson Rogers** for the title. (01-10-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

DAYTON—Rockstar Pro Wrestling at

& **Deion Johnson** defeated **Danny Miles** & **Zane Riley** ... **Mickie James** pinned **Tessa Blanchard** ... Heavyweight champion **Flex Armstrong** defeated **Bam Shaw** ... **Ricky Morton** & **Robert Gibson** defeated **Dr. Tom Prichard** & **Randy Rose** ... **Matt Hardy** defeated **Sabu** in a TLC match. (01-10-15)

—Shawn O'Domski

TENNESSEE

HUMBOLDT—New Breed Pro Wrestling at the New Breed Arena: **Tony White** beat **Venom** ... **Funhouse** beat **Tommy Angel** ... **Pretty Boy James**, **Richard Ring**, & **Sean Spade** beat **The Dynasty** ... **Brian Michaels** & **Matt Storm** defeated **Gage** & **Alex Cross** ... **Quiksilver** defeated **Geno Sydal**. (01-23-15)

—James Morgan

JASPER—AIWF Young Blood Wrestling at the YBW Arena: **Bart Maverick** pinned **Sebastian Wright** ... **Blood-4-Blood** (**Sinister** & **Acid**) beat **Jed Walker** & **Tristen Archer** ... **Jason Williams** vs. **Adam Powers** ended in a time-limit

draw ... **L'I Bink** pinned **R.J. Starr** ... **Mikey G** pinned **Alex Wyld**. (01-10-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

CHATTANOOGA—WWE at the McKenzie Center: **Kofi Kingston** pinned Intercontinental champion **Bad News Barrett** in a non-title match ... **Los Matadores** (**Diego** & **Fernando**) beat **Titus O'Neil** & **David Otunga** ... **Luke Harper** beat **Curtis Axel** ... **Dean Ambrose** defeated **Bray Wyatt** ... **Natalya** beat **Paige** ... **Big E** & **Xavier Woods** beat **Goldust** & **Stardust** ... **John Cena** pinned **Seth Rollins** in a streetfight. (01-09-15)

—Larry Fenton

MILLERSVILLE—NWA SAW at TJ's SAW Mill: **David Morton** defeated **Kerry Awful** ... **Hammerjack** & **Kevin Weatherby** beat **Tim Renesto** & **Bubba Gordon** ... **LBK** beat **Kaleb Monroe** ... **Ali Shabazz** defeated Southern junior heavyweight champion **Corey Crews** for the title ... **Drew Haskins** beat **Michael Steele** ... **Arrick Andrews** defeated **Tyson Dean**. (01-02-15)

—Lekisha F. Oliver

TEXAS

DALLAS—AIWF/Wrecking Ball Wrestling at the Indoor Soccer Zone: **Gene Valdez** beat **Broken Keith** and **Kevin McAllister** in a three-way ... **Joey Garcia** pinned **Kase Time** ... **Lazerus James** pinned **Craig Jericho** ... **Tony Martin** & **Van Johnson** beat **Robert Wagoner** & **Brian Tonic** ... **Max Muscles** pinned **Big Poppa** ... **Chuey Martinez** & **Big Sed** beat **Tommy** & **Billy Bong**. (01-25-15)

—Will Martin

HOUSTON—WWE at the Toyota Center: Tag team champions **Jey** & **Jimmy Uso** beat **The Miz** & **Damien Mizdow** ... **Sin Cara** pinned **Tyson Kidd** ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Curtis Axel** by submission ... **Justin Gabriel** pinned **Adam Rose** ... **Roman Reigns** beat U.S. champion **Rusev** by DQ ... **Naomi**, **Paige**, & **Emma** defeated **Alicia Fox**, **Cameron**, & **Summer Rae** ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Cesaro** ... **Dean Ambrose** pinned **Bray Wyatt** in a streetfight. (01-18-15)

—Steve Beyer

SAN ANTONIO—WWE at the Freeman Coliseum: **R-Truth** pinned Intercontinental champion **Wade Barrett** in a non-title match ... **Luke Harper** defeated **Alex Riley** ... **Los Matadores** (**Diego**, **Fernando**, & **El Torito**) beat **Titus O'Neil**, **David Otunga**, & **Hornswoggle** ... **Daniel Bryan** pinned **Kane** ... **Brie Bella** defended **Nikki Bella's** Divas title against **Natalya** ... **Kofi Kingston** & **Big E** beat **Goldust** & **Stardust** ... **John Cena** pinned **Seth Rollins** in a streetfight. (01-18-15)

—Beth Norton

ABILENE—WWE at the Taylor County



Roman Reigns hangs on for dear life against Kane and Big Show (above left) before being aided by his cousin, The Rock. With The Authority's henchmen out of the picture, Reigns assures his spot in the WrestleMania 31 main event by eliminating Rusev (above right).



Coliseum: **R-Truth** pinned Intercontinental champion **Wade Barrett** in a non-title match ... **Luke Harper** defeated **Alex Riley** ... **Los Matadores** (**Diego**, **Fernando**, & **El Torito**) beat **Titus O'Neil**, **David Otunga**, & **Fandango** ... **Daniel Bryan** pinned **Kane** ... Divas champion **Nikki Bella** beat **Natalya** ... **Kofi Kingston** & **Big E** beat **Goldust** & **Stardust** ... **John Cena** pinned **Seth Rollins** in a streetfight. (01-17-15)

—Steve Beyer

BEAUMONT—WWE at the Ford Arena: **Ryback** beat **Kane** ... **Darren Young** defeated **Alex Riley** ... **Alicia Fox**, **Naomi**, & **Emma** defeated **Summer Rae**, **Cameron**, & **Sasha Banks** ... **Jack Swagger** defeated **Cesaro** ... **Justin Gabriel** beat **Adam Rose** ... **Sin Cara** defeated **Tyson Kidd** ... **Big Show** beat **Erick Rowan** ... **Roman Reigns** defeated U.S. champion **Rusev** in a non-title match. (01-04-15)

—Steve Beyer

HIDALGO—WWE at the State Farm Arena: Intercontinental champion **Dolph Ziggler** beat **Luke Harper** ... **New Day** (**Kofi Kingston**, **Big E**, & **Xavier Woods**) beat **Curtis Axel**, **Goldust**, & **Stardust** ... **Dean Ambrose** defeated **Bray Wyatt** in a streetfight ... **R-Truth** beat **Fandango** ... **Los Matadores** (**Diego** & **Fernando**) defeated **Titus O'Neil** & **Tyler Breeze** ... **John Cena** defeated **Bad News Barrett** in a streetfight. (01-04-15)

—Beth Norton

WEST VIRGINIA

HARPERS FERRY—Primal Conflict Wrestling at the KOA: **Logan Easton LaRoux** & **Alexander James** defeated **Jack** & **Jimmy Cicero**, **The Fantastic Ones**, and **Sudden Impact** in a four-way ... **Doug Delicious** pinned **Mark Bravura** ... **Jason Kincaid** & **Matt Conard** beat tag team champions **Ken Dixon** & **G-Fed** to win the tag team title ... **Justice** beat **Benny Conley** ... Heavyweight champion **Bobby Shields** pinned **Fenix Fury** ... **Bob Holly**, **Sonjay Dutt**, & **Nui Tofiga** defeated **Black Wallstreet** (**Drolif**, **Chuck Lennox**, & **Solo**). (01-24-15)

—Taylor Cates

INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

WINDSOR, ON—Border City Wrestling at the University of Windsor Student Centre: **Aiden Prince** defeated **N8 Mattson**, **Benny Boone**, & **Muscles Marinara** in a four-way ... **Kongo Kong** pinned **Mark Vandy** ... **Great Sanada** & **A-1** beat **Joe Doering** & **Joe Coleman** ... **Tyson Dux** pinned **Abe Jackson** ... **Brad Martin** pinned **Phil Atlas** ... **Rhino** pinned **John E. Bravo** ... Heavyweight champion **Jon Bolen** pinned **Cody Deaner**. (01-20-15)

—Leonard Brand

NEW MINAS, NS—Championship Wrestling Action at the Louis Millett Community Complex: **Shane Stephens** pinned **Greaser** ... **Damien Spades** pinned **Cody Youndblood** ... **Jaxon Fury** beat **Greyson King** and **James William Ritchie** in a triple-threat ... **Nick Diggs** pinned **Donnie V.** ... **JP Simms** pinned **Jaden Cole** ... **Tommy Starr** beat heavyweight champion **Aaron Matthews** by DQ. (01-17-15)

—Mike Benjamin

KELOWNA, BC—Big West at Lake City Bowling & Billiards: **K5 Qualifying Matches:** **Mike Shreddz** pinned **Mean Machine Sr.** ... **Shotgun Stevens** pinned **KROFTON** ... **Matt XStatic** pinned **Mean Machine Jr.** ... **Andy the Dreadful Bird** pinned **Black Dragon** ... **Collin Cutler** pinned **Thompson Valley Tiger** ... **K5 Ladder Match:** **Mike Shreddz** beat **Andy Bird**, **Collin Cutler**, **Matt XStatic**, & **Shotgun Stevens** to win the **K5 Medallion** ... **Non-Tournament Match:** **Sugar Cousins** (**Mad Dog** & **Shane**) defeated **House of Hell** (**Danni Deeds** & **Vulture of Doom**). (01-16-15)

—Marty Solotki

ENGLAND

TONBRIDGE—IPW:UK at the Angel: **The Alpha Males** (**Iestyn Rees** & **Charlie Garrett**) defeated **Alpha Strike** (**Alpha Dreams** & **Mike Broly**) ... **Earl Jonathan Windsor** pinned **Sha**

Samuels ... **The London Riots** (**James Davis** & **Rob Lynch**) defeated **Jonny Storm** & **Jody Fleisch** ... **Grado** vs. **Jon Ryan** ended in a no-contest ... **Will Ospreay** pinned **Paul Robinson** ... **Bad Bones** pinned **The Mexican Eagle** ... **Jimmy Havoc** & **Jon Ryan** defeated **Grado** & **U-Gené**. (01-11-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

LONDON—Progress Wrestling at The Garage: **Mike Hitchman**, **Mischa East**, & **The Angels of Retribution** (**Kyle Ashmore** & **Steve Burden**) defeated **Earl Black Jr.**, **Rhia O'Reilly**, **Damon Moser**, & **Danny** ... **Alie Armstrong** defeated **Isaac Zercher** in a no-DQ match ... **Pastor William Eaver** vs. **Mason Ryan** ended in a no-contest ... **Tom Irvin** pinned **Chuck Mambo** ... **Zack Sabre Jr.** beat **Sebastian** by submission. (01-04-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

SELSDON—IPW:UK at the Selsdon Community Centre: **Will Ospreay** pinned **Scott Star** ... **The Monsters** (**Snare** & **eXodus**) defeated **D&D** (**Danny Duggan** & **Cieran Donnelly**) ... **Dave Mastiff** pinned **Mason Ryan** ... **Jimmy Havoc** pinned **Jonny Storm** ... **El Jonathano Windsor** pinned **Cuban Heat** ... **The LDRs** (**Zack Sabre Jr.** & **Marty Scurll**) defeated **The London Riots**. (01-03-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

SCOTLAND

GLASGOW—Scottish Wrestling Alliance at the Source Wrestling School: **Scott McManus**, **Kieran McColm**, & **Matt Daily** defeated **The Forgotten** (**Glen Dunbar**, **Alex Cavanagh**, & **Jam O'Malley**) ... **Debbie Sharpe** pinned **Viper** ... **Muay Tache** (**DCT** & **Adam Carrell**) defeated **Manlon** & **Daihlán Hendry** ... **Lewis Girvan** pinned **Big Damo** ... **Robbie Solar** pinned **Joe Smyth** ... **The Gatecrashers** (**Christopher Saynt** & **Dave Conrad**) defeated **Bobby Roberts** & **Cobra Carr** ... **Nikki Storm** pinned **Sammii Jayne** ... **Ryan Griffin** pinned **Rampage Brown**. (01-04-15)

—Thomas J. Rude

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LES IS MORE?

The selection of Brock Lesnar as Wrestler of the Year drew quite a negative reaction from our readers, especially considering it was our readers who voted him the honor in the first place.

"The logic of the voters makes absolutely no sense," wrote reader Craig Barton. "They didn't vote for Daniel Bryan, presumably because he missed so much time in the latter half of the year. Yet they did vote for Brock Lesnar, whose total ring time was a little over an hour."

"In a year where Daniel Bryan missed seven months of action and Brock Lesnar graced us with his presence for about an hour, how is it that AJ Styles was not voted Wrestler of the Year?" asked Mike Andrews. "I'm still shocked."

Brad Miller is one reader who feels the voters got it right. "He broke The Undertaker's streak and he broke John Cena's spirit — both momentous achievements. Nobody else could have done that. Lesnar was the right choice."

PW/PODCAST

I was thrilled to find out that *PWI* is now offering a free podcast. Hosts Dan Murphy and Al Castle are two of the most astute analysts of the sport, and it's great to be able to hear them interact with one another. And best of all, it's free!

As a long-time reader of *PWI*, I was thrilled to hear Craig Peters interviewed on Episodes 2 and 3. Craig was a huge part of *PWI*'s history and he obviously still has a place in his heart for the magazine and the sport.

I'd love to hear more interviews with former and current *PWI* writers, especially the great Eddie Ellner!

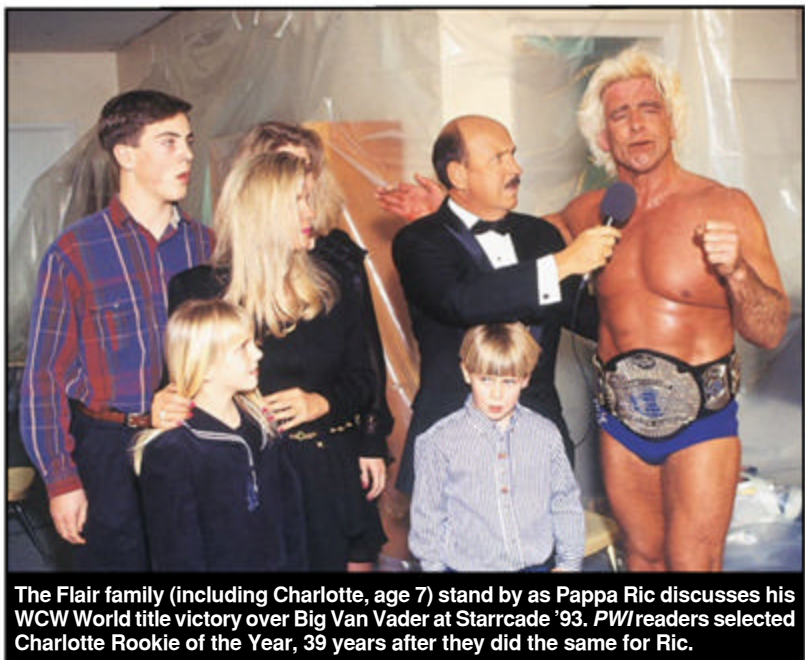
FRANKIE ALLISON
Bridgeport, CT

ON HER OWN

It was fascinating to read in the "Rookie Of The Year" write-up (April 2015) how determined Charlotte was to make it on her own, rather than take advantage of the Flair name. It makes her selection that much more meaningful.

It's not that fans aren't aware of the fact that she's Ric Flair's daughter, but the "Nature Boy's" not the first thing you think of when you see her in the ring. The woman is superbly talented in her own right, and I look forward to seeing her perform for many years to come (though not quite as many as her dad!).

PAULINE McDERMOTT
Spokane, WA



The Flair family (including Charlotte, age 7) stand by as Papa Ric discusses his WCW World title victory over Big Van Vader at Starrcade '93. *PWI* readers selected Charlotte Rookie of the Year, 39 years after they did the same for Ric.



As requested by reader Brad Monroe, here's another photo of Dick "The Destroyer" Beyer (right) with son Kurt rappelling down the 357-foot Seneca Niagara Casino and Hotel in Western New York.

MEMORY LAPSE

After all that happened in 2014, it's hard for me to believe that the most enduring memory of the year (April 2015) for your publisher was John Cena getting his butt kicked by Brock Lesnar at SummerSlam. What's Stu Saks drinking?

RICH MALDANADO
Buffalo, NY

[Editor's note: Stu, being the gentleman that he is, allows the other writers to select their lasting memory of the year before he does. (No two writers are allowed to choose the same one.) Said Saks: "I've been watching wrestling for more than 45 years, and never once did I see a man take such a sustained beating from someone of Lesnar's stature and keep coming back for more.

I was more inspired by Cena in that loss than any win he's ever had."

NOT EXCITED

I don't know why everybody's getting so jacked up about Sting showing up in WWE. I was floored when I received my April 2015 issue and found out that 39 percent of the readers voted him Comeback Wrestler of the Year. For what? One confrontation with Triple-H at Survivor Series?

I have been a Sting fan since the beginning of his career, but let's be real. For all the talk of him reviving his career in WWE, the man left his best years behind 10, 15 years ago.

Bobby Lashley deserved to be voted Comeback Wrestler.

RAY MARTINEZ
Alanson, MI

OCTOGENARIAN WONDER

That was such a cool photo you ran of the 84-year-old Destroyer rappelling down the 357-foot building in the "Year In Quotes" in the April 2015 issue. I hated The Destroyer as a kid when he came up against Fred Blassie, but later came to respect him. Would you happen to have another photo of this incredible feat?

BRAD MONROE
San Bernardino, CA

AJ & ADR

Dan Murphy made a good point in his April 2015 "International Report" when he compared Alberto Del Rio's career trajectory to that of AJ Styles. Both men left major brands at the top of their careers, found success on the international level, and then became major attractions for Ring of Honor. Both of these men add so much to a wrestling card, and, with their experience, probably add a lot to the locker rooms as well.

From what I've read, TNA made a proposal to Alberto but was rebuffed. I don't think he has anything against TNA per se, but I do think that after spending several years with WWE, he's looking forward to calling his own shots, wrestling as often as he so chooses.

A showdown between AJ and Alberto el Patron is inevitable and would probably be a candidate for 2015 Match of the Year. I know I'd pay to see it.

WILLIAM BORMAN
Dayton, OH

OILS WELL ...

First the oil prices plummet and then we're told that *PW!* was dropping its prices. It was a great Christmas indeed!

LAURA BELMONT
Plano, TX

PWI OFFICIAL RATINGS

FOR PERIOD ENDED
FEBRUARY 4, 2015

TOP 10

- 1 BROCK LESNAR**
286, Minneapolis, MN
(1) **WWE World heavyweight champion**
- 2 JOHN CENA**
251, West Newbury, MA
(2) **No. 1 contender WWE World title**
- 3 DANIEL BRYAN**
210, Aberdeen, WA
(-) **No. 2 contender WWE World title**
- 4 HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
230, Gifu, Japan
(3) **IWGP heavyweight champion**
- 5 ROMAN REIGNS**
265, Pensacola, FL
(-) **No. 3 contender WWE World title**
- 6 SETH ROLLINS**
217, Davenport, IA
(6) **No. 4 contender WWE World title**
- 7 RUSEV**
305, Plovdiv, Bulgaria
(9) **WWE U.S. champion**
- 8 JAY BRISCOE**
234, Sandy Fork, DE
(7) **Ring of Honor World Champion**
- 9 KURT ANGLE**
240, Pittsburgh, PA
(-) **TNA World Champion**
- 10 DEAN AMBROSE**
225, Cincinnati, OH
(5) **No. 5 contender WWE World title**

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHWEST WRESTLING



KURT ANGLE

TAG TEAMS

- 1 BOBBY FISH & KYLE O'REILLY**
Combined weight: 386 pounds
(1) **Ring of Honor tag team champions**
- 2 JIMMY & JEV USO**
Combined weight: 479 pounds
(6) **WWE World tag team champion**
- 3 KATSUYORI SHIBATA & HIROOKI GOTO**
Combined weight: 454 pounds
(2) **IWGP tag team champions**
- 4 DAVEY RICHARDS & EDDIE EDWARDS**
Combined weight: 416 pounds
(-) **TNA World tag team champions**
- 5 MIKEY NICHOLLS & SHANE HASTE**
Combined weight: 447 pounds
(-) **Global Honored tag team champions**
- 6 KONNOR & VIKTOR**
Combined weight: 487 pounds
(-) **No. 1 contenders WWE World tag team title**
- 7 JAY & MARK BRISCOE**
Combined weight: 430 pounds
(7) **No. 1 contenders Ring of Honor tag team title**
- 8 CESARO & TYSON KIDD**
Combined weight: 427 pounds
(-) **No. 2 contenders WWE World tag team title**
- 9 KAZ HAYASHI & SHUJI KONDO**
Combined weight: 403 pounds
(-) **Wrestle-1 tag team champions**
- 10 NEGRO CASAS & SHOCKER**
Combined weight: 390 pounds
(-) **CMLL tag team champions**

WWE

WWE World Heavyweight Champion:

BROCK LESNAR

(C) 286, Minneapolis, MN

- 1—JOHN CENA**
(1) 251, West Newbury, MA
- 2—DANIEL BRYAN**
(-) 210, Aberdeen, WA
- 3—ROMAN REIGNS**
(9) 265, Pensacola, FL
- 4—SETH ROLLINS**
(4) 217, Davenport, IA
- 5—RUSEV**
(5) 305, Plovdiv, Bulgaria
- 6—DEAN AMBROSE**
(3) 225, Cincinnati, OH
- 7—BRAY WYATT**
(2) 285, Brooksville, FL
- 8—DOLPH ZIGGLER**
(6) 221, Hollywood, CA
- 9—BAD NEWS BARRETT**
(-) 246, Manchester, England
- 10—RYBACK**
(7) 291, Las Vegas, NV

- 11—BIG SHOW**
(10) 425, Tampa, FL
- 12—LUKE HARPER**
(8) 275, Lincoln, NB
- 13—ERICK ROWAN**
(16) 315, Minneapolis, MN
- 14—CHRIS JERICHO**
(-) 227, Winnipeg, MB
- 15—KANE**
(15) 323, Jefferson City, TN
- 16—JACK SWAGGER**
(11) 275, Perry, OK
- 17—CESARO**
(13) 232, Lucerne, Switzerland
- 18—R-TRUTH**
(14) 220, Charlotte, NC
- 19—THE MIZ**
(20) 220, Cleveland, OH
- 20—DARREN YOUNG**
(-) 239, Miami, FL

TNA

World Champion:

KURT ANGLE

(-) 240, Pittsburgh, PA

- 1—LASHLEY**
(2) 273, Denver, CO
- 2—BOBBY ROODE**
(C) 225, New York, NY
- 3—MVP**
(1) 252, Miami, FL
- 4—JAMES STORM**
(8) 240, Leiper's Fork, TN
- 5—SAMOA JOE**
(-) 289, American Samoa
- 6—ETHAN CARTER III**
(-) 225, Cleveland, OH
- 7—DREW GALLOWAY**
(-) 247, Ayr, Scotland
- 8—AUSTIN ARIES**
(3) 202, Milwaukee, WI
- 9—MAGNUS**
(10) 240, King's Lynn, England
- 10—BRAM**
(4) 214, King's Lynn, England

ROH

Champion:

JAY BRISCOE

(C) 234, Sandy Fork, DE

- 1—JAY LETHAL**
(2) 225, Elizabeth, NJ
- 2—MICHAEL ELGIN**
(3) 265, Toronto, ON
- 3—ALBERTO EL PATRON**
(-) 239, San Luis Potosi, Mexico
- 4—HANSON**
(4) 265, Lynn, MA
- 5—TOMASSO CIAMPA**
(5) 223, Palermo, Sicily
- 6—MICHAEL BENNETT**
(6) 225, Carver, MA
- 7—MATT SYDAL**
(10) 165, St. Louis, MO
- 8—MATT TAVEN**
(7) 219, Boston, MA
- 9—ACH**
(8) 190, Austin, TX
- 10—RODERICK STRONG**
(9) 212, New Orleans, LA

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or tag team. These ratings are compiled by a committee consisting of Stu Saks, Dan Murphy, Kris Zellner, Louie Dee, Harry Burkett and STRIGGA (cagematch.net, purolove.com). The numbers in parenthesis indicate a wrestler's position in that category last issue. Agate-sized ratings are supplied to *PWI* by promoters and can be e-mailed to us at pwireresults@yahoo.com (please put the word "ratings" in the subject line).

ALLIED INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATIONS: CHAMPION—Justin Overstreet; **1**—TR Superstar; **2**—Josef Von Schmidt; **3**—Mason Myles; **4**—Lance Erickson; **5**—Toby Farley; **6**—Eric Michaels; **7**—Damien Wayne; **8**—Sugar Dunkerton; **9**—Mark Magnum; **10**—Dominic Monroe

EVOLVE: CHAMPION—Drew Galloway; **1**—Johnny Gargano; **2**—Caleb Konley; **3**—Ricochet; **4**—Biff Busick; **5**—Timothy Thatcher; **6**—Chris Hero; **7**—Uhaa Nation; **8**—AR Fox; **9**—Roderick Strong; **10**—PJ Black

CHICAGO STYLE WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Steve Boz; **1**—Acid Jaz; **2**—Marshe Rockett; **3**—Colin Cambridge; **4**—Willie Richardson; **5**—Hunter Paine; **6**—Marco Anthony; **7**—Sean Mulligan; **8**—Mitch Blake; **9**—The Lunatic; **10**—Chris Miller

EMERGE WRESTLING: CHAMPION—JD Mariani; **1**—Donny Idol; **2**—Ace Perry; **3**—Dash Venture; **4**—Ricky Ruckus; **5**—Joe Pittman; **6**—Kris Kaliber; **7**—Damian Cole; **8**—Apollo Garvin; **9**—Aaron Anarchy; **10**—Gary Jay

FULL IMPACT PRO: CHAMPION—Rich Swann; **1**—Chasyn Rance; **2**—Roderick Strong; **3**—Michael Tarver; **4**—Trent Barreta; **5**—Martin Stone; **6**—Jody Kristofferson; **7**—Teddy Hart; **8**—Lince Dorado; **9**—Maxwell Chicago; **10**—Rhett Giddins

GALLI LUCHA LIBRE: CHAMPION—GPA; **1**—Mike Anthony; **2**—Ricky Cruz; **3**—Mojo McQueen; **4**—Acid Jaz; **5**—Imperio Azteca; **6**—Barry Rytte; **7**—Kunai Silencio; **8**—Chris Castro; **9**—Ovirload; **10**—Golden Dragon

LUCHA UNDERGROUND: CHAMPION—Prince Puma; **1**—Mil Muertes; **2**—King Cuerno; **3**—Cage; **4**—Johnny Mundo; **5**—Big Ryck; **6**—Pentagon Jr.; **7**—Blue Demon Jr.; **8**—Sexy Star; **9**—Chavo Guerrero Jr.; **10**—Drago

MOUNTAIN STATE WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Ken Steel; **1**—Barry Hardy; **2**—Scott Lee; **3**—Thunder Morgan; **4**—Se7en; **5**—John Heartbreak; **6**—Jimmy Parker; **7**—BoBo Brown; **8**—Damien James; **9**—Mark James; **10**—T.D. Hurt

NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: CHAMPION—Rob Conway; **1**—Hiroshi Tenzan; **2**—Tim Storm; **3**—Lou Marconi; **4**—Jax Dane; **5**—Satoshi Kojima; **6**—Jason Kincaid; **7**—Byron Wilcott; **8**—Chase Owens; **9**—Damien Wayne; **10**—Matt Riviera

PRIMAL CONFLICT WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Bobby Shields; **1**—Jason Kincaid; **2**—Dirty Money; **3**—Sonjay Dutt; **4**—Logan Easton LaRoux; **5**—Nui Tofiga; **6**—Fenix Fury; **7**—Justice; **8**—Matt Conard; **9**—Drolix; **10**—Doug Delicious

UPROAR PRO WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Alex Chamberlain; **1**—Eddie Graves; **2**—Jay Lethal; **3**—Mason Ryan; **4**—Torcher; **5**—QT Marshall; **6**—Leo Brien; **7**—Shawn Prime; **8**—Maxx Stardom; **9**—Mike Reed; **10**—Oliver Cain

WRECKING BALL WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Lazerus James; **1**—Van Johnson; **2**—Big Sed; **3**—Kase Time; **4**—Chuey Martinez; **5**—Lumberjack Martin; **6**—Tonic; **7**—Joe Garcia; **8**—Diez Caraz; **9**—Jamie Holley; **10**—Jonathan Mayfield

NXT

Champion:
SAMI ZAYN
(C) 205, Montreal, QC

- 1—ADRIAN NEVILLE**
(1) 194, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Eng.
- 2—FINN BALOR**
(7) 190, Bray, Ireland
- 3—KEVIN OWENS**
(9) 266, Marietta, GA
- 4—BARON CORBIN**
(2) 275, Lenexa, KA
- 5—HIDE ITAMI**
(3) 182, Tokyo, Japan
- 6—BULL DEMPSEY**
(5) 300, Brooklyn, NY
- 7—TYLER BREEZE**
(4) 195, Penticton, BC
- 8—TYSON KIDD**
(8) 195, Calgary, AB
- 9—SOLOMON CROWE**
(-) 200, Bellefontaine, OH
- 10—KALISTO**
(6) 170, Mexico City, Mexico

JAPAN

- 1—HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
(1) 230, Gifu, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion
- 2—BxB HULK**
(2) 172, Sapporo, Japan
- 3—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI**
(3) 200, Konosu, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
- 4—GO SHIOZAKI**
(-) 240, Kumamoto, Japan
AJPW heavyweight champion
- 5—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA**
(5) 230, Kyoto, Japan
- 6—AJ STYLES**
(-) 215, Gainesville, GA
- 7—HARASHIMA**
(6) 190, Tokyo, Japan
- 8—KOHEI SATO**
(7) 220, Tokyo, Japan
- 9—KEIJI MUTO**
(8) 240, Fujiyoshida, Japan
- 10—SHUJI ISHIKAWA**
(-) 264, Oshu, Japan

MEXICO

- 1—EL TERRIBLE**
(3) 230, Nuevo Leon, Mexico
CMLL heavyweight champion
- 2—ALBERTO EL PATRON**
(1) 239, San Luis Potosi, Mexico
AAA heavyweight champion
- 3—ANGEL DE ORO**
(4) 181, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
- 4—MEPHISTO**
(6) 200, Toluca, Mexico
- 5—STUKA JR.**
(-) 185, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
- 6—VOLADOR JR.**
(7) 192, Monclova, Mexico
- 7—DRAGON ROJO**
(8) 187, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
- 8—LA SOMBRA**
(-) 180, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
- 9—TITAN**
(9) 187, Jalisco, Mexico
- 10—EL BARBARO CAVERNARIO**
(-) 196, Jalisco, Mexico

WOMEN

- 1—NIKKI BELLA**
(1) 131, Scottsdale, AZ
WWE Divas champion
- 2—TARYN TERRELL**
(3) 120, Orlando, FL
TNA Knockouts champion
- 3—AWESOME KONG**
(-) 272, Tokyo, Japan
- 4—PAIGE**
(5) 120, Norwich, England
- 5—JESSICA HAVOK**
(4) 170, Defiance, OH
- 6—GAIL KIM**
(-) 120, Toronto, ON
- 7—CHARLOTTE**
(8) 135, Charlotte, NC
- 8—NATALYA**
(-) 135, Calgary, AB
- 9—BARBI HAYDEN**
(7), 119, College Station, TX
- 10—SEXY STAR**
(-) 125, Monterrey, Mexico

DRAWING BLOOD

BY JASON CONLAN

REY MYSTERIO IS REPORTEDLY VERY UNHAPPY IN THE WWE. WORD IS, THAT WHEN HIS CONTRACT EXPIRES, HE MAY VERY WELL "JUMP SHIP" !!

NO DOUBT BLOWING OUT BOTH HIS KNEES IN THE PROCESS?!



THAT'S, AH.. WHAT DO THEY CALL HIM.. EL PATREON?

EL PATRON.

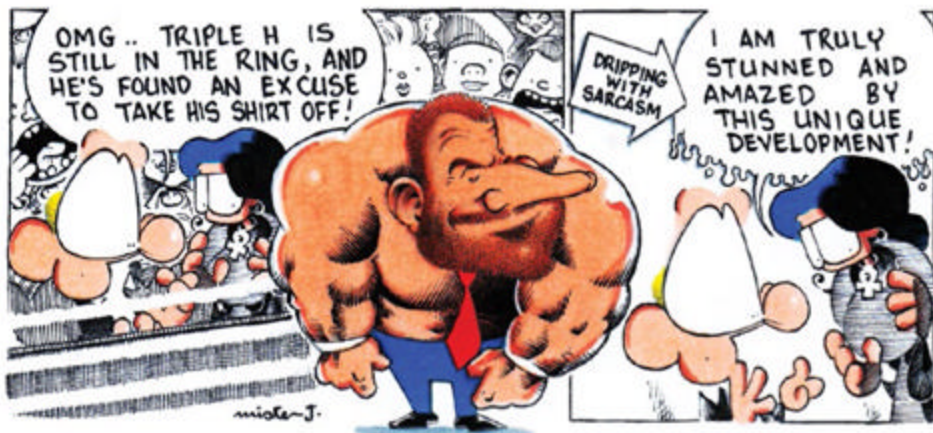
WAIT... SO HE'S NOT A CROWD-FUNDED WRESTLER?!



OMG.. TRIPLE H IS STILL IN THE RING, AND HE'S FOUND AN EXCUSE TO TAKE HIS SHIRT OFF!

DRIPPING WITH SARCASTM

I AM TRULY STUNNED AND AMAZED BY THIS UNIQUE DEVELOPMENT!



IMPACT

WRESTLING



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